

AN IRISH  
HISTORICAL STORY





1796]





# DALARADIA;

OR,

## THE DAYS OF KING MILCHO.

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BY

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"SONGS, POEMS AND BALLADS," &c., &c.

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NEW YORK:  
P. J. KENEDY,  
EXCELSIOR CATHOLIC PUBLISHING HOUSE,  
5 BARCLAY STREET,  
1896.



# DALARADIA;

## *OR, THE DAYS OF KING MILCHO.*

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### CHAPTER I.

#### SYBILLA AND HER FOSTER-SISTER.

The scene was fair; an earthly Eden, blest  
With all the glorious tints that gild the West.  
But they who strayed amid the woodlands green  
Were dearer, fairer, brighter than the scene.

THE BARD OF MOURNE.

It was Summer time, in the year of grace, 432. The green woods of Dalaradia\* were clothed in their richest verdure, and a bright and unclouded sun smiled upon the land. The breeze slept upon the unruffled breast of the waters, and all seemed hushed in silence and repose. "Alps upon Alps," in all their beauty and sublimity, raised their furrowed and shaggy fronts to the clouds, while high above all, the Colon soared as lord of the range, in pyramidal majesty, where the sun ever gilds its crest, and a feathery cloud, all on fire with his rays, rests on its topmost peak and turbans it with glory.

The mountain masses of shade were flung upon the sleeping sea, which reflected them in its waters in huge and magnificent proportions. Their bases and sides were tessellated

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\* Antrim.

with verdant corn fields and forests, and their brown heads, wreathed in clouds, stretched far into the heavens. Stalwart and imperishable, in all the rude freedom of untamed magnificence, they stood, the bulwarks of Emania\* and the sentinels of Dalaradia.

Deep in the valley, and clear and pure as the skies that smiled down upon it, winding in many a silver coil, and laughing and leaping in the sun as it pursued its joyous way through glen and brake and dingle, past Cromleach, rath and round tower, through thick and darksome groves sacred to Bel and the Druids only, whose dark recesses had never been penetrated save by the holy and mysterious priests of the sun-god, the Braid, a bright and beautiful river, flowed, whose banks were fringed with oak, willow and laburnum, among whose branches the wild birds nestled and sung to the glad-some river as it merrily sped along. The valleys and hillsides were studded with shielings and cottages, from which the smoke, in spiral columns, curled gracefully in the air, or lay calm and motionless upon the stilly atmosphere, giving evidence of animation and life in that lone and sequestered valley. These were the humble dwellings of the herdsmen who tended the flocks and herds of Milcho, the great chieftain of the territory. Numerous huts were scattered along the coast, but at a safe distance from the encroachments of the sea, whose waves, when stirred to anger or lashed to fury by Crom, their sea-god, startled their souls with fear, and caused them to offer sacrifices for the propitiation of the angry deity. When viewed from the summit of Slieve Mis, impending in awful state over the lovely scenes below, outspreading far and wide, and basking in the Summer sun, the sight was indeed wild, beautiful and grand. From the rocky battlements of Dunluce to the silvery strands of Carnlough and Glenarm, or from Bengore Head to the far-off waters of Aghaloe, no brighter scene rose up, or fairer landscape lay, in all green Ulster.

Milcho, the chief of the valley and lord of Dalaradia, was

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\* Ulster.

descended from a long line of ancestors, famous for their physical beauty and renowned for their prowess in war and the chase. His castle, with bawn and fosse and all the warlike improvements which that rude and savage age could devise, stood in the very heart of the valley and within easy reach of Slieve Mis, where his fat beeves and numerous herds lazily wandered and browsed. Sprung from a proud and haughty race, and inured from boyhood to the toils and dangers of war, he was of a fierce and stubborn disposition; and ruled with ungloved hand the followers and clansmen whose fealty he claimed and who dwelt with him in his fortress of barbaric power. He had followed the banner of Nial of the Hostages when he, with his Dalaradians, foraged the vineyards and castles of the Gaul. He had met the legions of Rome in its brightest epoch of supreme potency; had braved the wild and hardy sea rovers of Scandinavia; and the surrounding nations, Oriental and Occidental, had heard of the fame of him who had served under the great Nial.

Though stricken in years at the time we introduce him to our readers, he was still a man of massive and stalwart proportions, and one on whom time, though it had silvered his hair and beard, leant with feathery finger upon the stout frame that had so often braved danger and death in the shock of battle. But since the demise of the warlike Nial and the succession of his more peaceful son, Laegari, to the throne, peace had reigned in the bosoms of the Irish chiefs; the periodical predatory raids in Britain and Gaul had been abandoned; and the fierce lords, whose sole pleasure and enjoyment was war, were fain to pass their time in the less noble but still pleasurable excitement of the chase. The chieftain of Dalaradia chafed at the curb which the young Ard Riagh had fastened on his warlike propensities; and, since he was not permitted to indulge in a sport more congenial to his feelings and inclinations, daily engaged in the arduous and sometimes dangerous pleasure of hunting the red deer and wild boar that thronged the woods around his dwelling. While engaged in the chase, his daughters, Sybilla, Ova and Elie, and their foster-sister, Una, were left under the protection of a band of

faithful retainers and slaves, whose duty it was to watch and guard them until their lord's return. Slavery, at this date, was common in Ireland, and in every chieftain's bawn a number of the soft sons and daughters of Britain and Gaul were kept to minister to the wants and pleasures of their Irish conquerors. They were generally prisoners of war, captured in the rude raids and forays of the Irish kings, with which the continent of Europe was then, unfortunately, too familiar with.

As the lord of Dalaradia is engaged in the chase on the day on which our story opens, we shall take advantage of his absence, and, while awaiting his return, take a glance at his stately castle and a few of its inmates.

It was a vast and massive pile for those days, rude in its architecture, but grand in its proportions. Two large towers of unhewn stone flanked it on either end, and in the centre stood the banquet hall. A large court, in which the chiefs and nobles were wont to indulge in athletic exercises, stood opposite, while at a convenient distance from the castle, rising on a sloping knoll, beside a stately round-tower, even then moss-grown and grey, were pitched the tents wherein the slaves and retainers of the chieftain dwelt during the Summer solstice.

It is nearing sunset. The glory of the fading day streams down upon the castle and its surroundings, and lights up no lovelier scene in all the scope of its vision. Graceful and beautiful the light clouds float in the west; the rich skies glow with crimson and azure, and pale, transparent green, and streaks of burnished gold. The scarlet-plumed robin darts through the air; the swallows wind their mazes on high; the polished poplar and stately fir glisten in the light, and the exulting and abounding river rushes by, as two young maidens, arrayed in the costume befitting their rank, emerge from the castle and seat themselves in a grassy plot at the base of one of the tall towers. One, who seems to be of superior rank, leans against a buttress, with a huge volume of vellum spread out before her. The book is embossed with knobs of silver, and its heavy clasps fall loose against the rough stone work, giving forth a tinkling sound every time the fair student

moves or even turns over a leaf. The volume is illumined and every page presents a picture, gorgeous with rich colours. The girl who holds the book seems to be musing on the pages, rather than admiring them. As she bends down, her long black tresses flow over her shoulders, upon the volume.

The face is beaming with intellectual beauty. There is a softness in it, when the eyes look up from the volume and the lashes are displayed to view, and there is a look of holy melting charity in the sweet face which reminds one of heaven and the angels. Her profusion of raven tresses seems to add a more delicate beauty to the countenance, which is aglow with radiant innocence and light, such as only belong to the youth. Her complexion is of a soft, pearly white that glows upon the leaf of a water lily, while her cheeks are fresh and bright as a half-opened moss rose. Her tresses too have that soft, purplish bloom upon them which seems, like the atmosphere of a picture, to soften the strong contrast between their blackness and the snow of the forehead. Her large, beautiful eyes are not entirely black, but are deep brown, that relieve them from the sharp brilliancy which renders a black eye often severe and unfeminine. She is tall and of a grand and commanding presence which is readily perceived even while she sits and bends over the book. She is Sybilla, the daughter of Milcho, the chief of Dalaradia, and the book which engrosses her attention is a precious volume relating to the mysteries of Druidism and its worship, and was presented to her by the Arch Druid Colman himself.

Una, her foster-sister, who sits beside her, though of the same age and stature, and in the full bloom of youth and beauty, is a different creature in manner and features. Both are beautiful, and endowed with an intellectual superiority rarely to be found even among the most princely and cultured of the land. Nurtured at the same bosom, and seldom or never separated since childhood, their love for each other had grown with

years; and their mutual fondness when together, and their grief when separated but only for a day, showed itself in such clear and undisguised form as could scarcely fail to be perceived by the most humble inmate of the castle. While Sybilla was of a melancholy and contemplative disposition, Una, on the contrary, was of a playful and mirth-provoking nature. Her mirth, however, was innocent and harmless, and while loved by all with whom she came in contact, she was clasped to the heart of Sybilla with all the fondness of a sister's love. Equal in stature, but more delicate in limb, though not in feature, than Sybilla, her beauty was of a different type, and presented a marked but lovely contrast to hers. Her wavy, golden hair fell in rich masses around her face and shoulders, and wantoned in many a careless curl about her face. Her blue and laughing eyes, seldom at rest, sparkled and shone with a beauteous brilliancy, pleasing and attractive.

While Sybilla pondered over the book before her, Una carelessly reclined beside a fragrant rose tree, picking the roses to pieces, one by one, and scattering them around her. As she demolished the last leaf on the stem she wistfully looked up at her companion, and observed a grave and anxious look upon her countenance. The book had fallen from her hand and lay open at her feet. Absorbed in reverie she heeded it not; but with her eyes cast on the ground, seemed lost to every object around her.

Noiselessly rising from her reclining posture, Una stole to her side, and throwing her arms around her, kissed her cheek. With a sweet smile Sybilla looked up and returned the caress.

"Of what are you thinking, dear Sybilla?" asked Una, seating herself by her side, and toying with her long tresses. "To judge by the anxious look on your face, your thoughts seem to be as deep and dark as Conra's himself."

"I have been pondering, Una, on the great truths contained in this volume. It explains part of the mysteries of our holy faith, of which few, but the most learned of our Druids know. I have been puzzled to comprehend some passages, but perhaps it is not given to such as me to do so."

"I thought none but the Druids and Vestals were permitted to penetrate the mysteries surrounding the Sun-god?"



"Yes; others who serve at the altars and sacred allowed the privilege of knowing certain secrets which unfolded to us. How happy must they be who pass the in the service of Bel! All other gods sink into nothing before him. The idols of the barbarian fall before his freedom and freedom lights the path of those who believe in his Gaze, Una, on those golden clouds that surround his way in the sky; how grand and beauteous they are; their are brighter than gold and sparkle more than diamonds Bel! Bel! well may we worship thee, for thy smile is the of the world and thy glory exceedeth all praise!"

The impassioned girl, as she spoke, pointed to the sun, w last beam was disappearing behind the hill, and prostrated self thrice on the ground. This was an act of devotion w the worshippers of Bel daily performed. Una followed example, and the rite being over, again seated herself by billa's side. An interval of silence followed. Una, who been thinking over the last words of Sybilla, turned to her companion and reclining her head on her knee, looked up into face and said:

"And yet, Sybilla, you have often told me that in other lands men do not worship Bel, but inanimate creatures, formed by their own hands, of stone or wood or brass."

"It is true, Una. This book which the great Arch Druid Conra gave me and bade me study, tells how the Gauls and Romans and other barbarian nations worship idols, and loathe some, venomous creatures, of whose very names we are ignorant. In some parts of Gaul, I have heard my father say, men worship a god whom they do not know or see, and yet believe in. They call themselves Christians."

"They must be a strange people indeed," remarked Una musingly. "Are they great warriors?"

"Great Warriors," echoed Sybilla, scornfully. "They believe not in war; their ignoble hearts never throbbed with the thought of glory or distinction in the field, or thrilled with the fierce joy that animates a Dalaradian chieftain on the morning of battle," and the proud lip of the fair pagan was wreathed in scorn.

"I have seen some trinkets with your sister Ova, which believe these Christians use in worship, and which your father brought home from Gaul, in his last expedition under King Nial; but I know not whether they belong to Rome or Gaul."

"They belong to Gaul," answered Sybilla, "and were part of the spoils captured at Gessoriacum, which our Dalaradians conquered. I have often heard Fergus, the bard, tell how the banners of the Romans went down before the light of the Sunburst flag—the emblem of Erie's god. And no wonder, continued the enthusiastic girl, a brighter flush lighting up her glowing features, "the prayers of our holy Druids follow Nial's standard; sacrifice was offered in the sacred groves, and from Bealtinne to Samhain\* a thousand Vestals prayed in Dalaradia for the success of Nial over the barbaric hosts of Rome and Gaul. On the return of the Dalaradians, the Arch Druid at Tara, with all his train of Priests and Vestals, met and welcomed them and again offered sacrifice to the Gods. A thousand Druids, gathered from the five points of Erie dressed in their sacred robes, and a thousand virgins arrayed in spotless white, bent before the holy fire of Belus that burned on the Arch priest's altar, and offered homage to Bel and Crom! Cú Una; to hear the voice and harp of Fergus portray, in impassioned melody, the glories of that day! It warms my father's soul with light and love, and kindles in his heart a fiery flame of hope, a throbbing ecstasy of joy, that Laegari, the successful of the great Nial, shall yet shake off the cloud of sloth that envelops him, and follow in the footsteps of his great father!"

"But surely, Sybilla, you, who are so gentle of nature, so sweet and loving, and so gifted with all the graces becoming a maiden, do not wish for war! Would you see your father, who loves you beyond aught else on earth, and your two chivalrous and beauteous brothers, torn from your arms and marched again against those barbarians, whom they have so often opposed and conquered? I cannot think, Sybilla, that you harbor such a thought."

"I love my father, Una, and my two brave brothers more than life, and would give my life at the smallest price to save

\* from May to November.

them from scathe or ill; but the perpetuation of my religion and the glory of my country are dearer still. And though it would rend my heart to part from those I love so well, still I would not shrink from the sacrifice, did our God ordain that war should ensue. I love it not, and deeply deplore the causes which lead to it, and set man against his fellow man. The wars of King Nial were just. I do not say this because the father was one of his trusted and bravest chiefs, and because The honors from his hands. The Roman legions invaded Gaul, and trampled on their vineyards and their shrines without one touch of pity or remorse. They next invaded Britain, and the touch sons of that sombre and foggy clime cried to Erie for soft Our fathers knew that the Scythian sea was but a feeble aid. rier between their hosts and ours. Their galleys darkened the ocean, and their legions were countless as the leaves in Dalaradia. Flushed with success, they hoped for greater conquests. The world was theirs, all but this spot of earth where Nial reigned as Ard Riagh. They wished to conquer us, and, with fire and sword pursued us to the death and put their yoke upon us; but they failed. Nial and his brave Dalaradians, issuing from their ships, burst upon them in their own strongholds, and in the very place they deemed their victory most secure, trampled down in wrath the proud banner which they deemed invincible. Rome has planted her foot on the bosoms of Gaul, Britain and Caledonia; but her eagle has never soared in Erie! Looking back on our past history, and hearing it repeated in my father's halls by the Druids, bards and Brehons, I cannot help feeling a glow of pride within my heart at mention of my religion and country; and if I cannot make myself distinctly understood, dear Una, it is because I have my father's passionate spirit, which, despite my utmost efforts to control it, makes me sometimes appear unfeminine."

"Pardon me, Sybilla, I meant not to charge you with anything unbecoming your sex. You are too good and kindhearted to entertain an unwomanly idea. It is I who am sometimes unfeminine, and wild and forgetful of the qualities becoming my station. The waywardness of my nature is such, that I am impulsively prompted to act contrary to what my prudence sug-

gests. I am of a light humor, and sometimes give way to fancies, which are only pardonable in a child. But I did not mean to chide."

"You are a dear, good creature, Una, and as loving and fond as you are blythesome and merry. Kiss me, and let me hasten to meet and welcome Fergus. I see him entering the castle gate."

Like a young fawn, Una rushed, bounding from her side and ran toward the gate. An aged and venerable man with long, white hair and beard approached. Though age had set its seal upon his face, he walked erect, with firm and unfaltering step. A harp was slung over his shoulder, and his costume which was rich and of different colors, as well as the gold band which encircled his throat, bespoke his rank and vocation. He was Fergus, the chief bard of Milcho, returning from the annual musical festival of Tara.

Laying a hand on the fair head of each, a bright smile lit up his face as he returned the salutations of the maidens.

"You have been long absent, Fergus," said Sybilla, "and we were beginning to fear that the beauty and attractions of Tara would wean you from our poor court of Dalaradia."

"The palace of Tara is beauteous and grand, and well becomes the great Ard Riagh of Ireland, but it has no gems or jewels brighter than those I now behold."

"Ah, Fergus, thy craft is ever prone to flattery, and the bard's eye discovers beauty where his heart is interested."

"It may be so, but who can judge of beauty better than the bard?"

"I will not discuss the question, Fergus; your honeyed tongue is more than a match for me in all that pertains to grace and beauty. But you must be wearied; let us not detain you longer."

"I am in haste to see the king; has he returned yet from the chase?"

"No, but I think I hear him coming."

A loud and shrill bugle blast sounded on their ears, and woke up the echoes of the hills. As Fergus proceeded to his apartment in the castle, the maidens hastened to the principal

gate that led to the court. As it swung open on its hinges, a gay cavalcade appeared. Mounted on strong-limbed and prancing steeds, with bronze spears and helmets and shining as the sun, and with green plumes dancing in the evening air, Milcho and a hundred Dalaradian warriors drew  
bridle-rein before the castle.

## CHAPTER II.

## THE OATH AGAINST ST. PATRICK.

The king sate at the feast that night,  
 In Antrim's royal hall,  
 With his vassal Tiernachs and men of might,  
 And iron chieftains all.

But the monarch shook in his royal chair,  
 While he tried to grasp the spear;  
 For the name of one had stricken him there,  
 And he looked a statue of fear.

The Irish people can only be thoroughly understood in their own land. Amid the mountain fastnesses of their own poetic country, where the quiet lake and the gushing rock-fountain sparkle in the sunlight, where the shady dell and flower-scented solitude are eloquent of all that is beauteous and sublime in nature, where the hills, on whose purple sides the eagles have built their nests for centuries, pillow their heads in golden light, or don their coronet of clouds; where every stone, every path, every desolate ruin, is haunted with some old legend of the glorious past. These are the spots upon which to study the Irish character and admire the romance, the life, the generous freshness of thought, and the striking heart-warmth of a people that suffering does not seem to dispirit, penury render selfish, nor privation rob of some of the noblest traits of our common nature.

When this is so in our own day; after centuries of persecution and slavery, robbery and spoliation, such as no other spot in the world has witnessed or borne, so black and demoniac in its character, that its gentlest deeds would pain the adamant heart of a Nero, how grand and glorious must the Irish character have been, when Nial held the sceptre of the island, and the fear and fame of his name and arms spread consternation through the legions of Rome; Feis Timbrach of Tara, where

the kings and nobles assembled, gave just and equitable laws to the land, which were scrupulously and willingly obeyed; when bard and brehon taught and sung, when music and poetry, these twin sisters of heaven, were cherished and cultivated by king and peasant, and the hospitable doors of the chiefs and nobles were ever open to receive and welcome the stranger and wanderer at their boards. These were the golden days of Ireland, when her chivalry, her honor and her name stood foremost in the world. But alas for our country: "Her pride fore-gone by." The soul-stirring strains of a Davis or a Moore have only awoken the dreamless sleep of the tomb; the stars in can-firmament have fallen; the sun of her glory has vanished, and the battles of her patriot brave have terminated in English slavery!

After gaining the castle, Milcho, preceded by his favorite slave, a dark-browed, long-haired native of Armorica, entered a chamber in the eastern wing—the king's dress-chamber, it was called—and disrobing himself of his hunting suit, donned it a less warlike and more appropriate one for the banquet hall. His toilet being completed, he hastily quaffed a goblet of wine presented to him by a slave, and seated himself on a convenient couch. Toying with the golden-hilted dagger or skein which hung at his girdle, his eyes wandered softly around the room, adorned with many a trophy of war and the chase, the lit up with a smile as the door was gently opened, and Sybilla entered and threw herself into her father's arms. She was followed by Una and her sisters Ova, and Elie. They knelt before him, and gently stroking their long and beautiful tresses, he stooped and affectionately kissed them on the cheek. Seateding themselves in a half-circle before him, they leant upon his shoulder or clung to his knees, and playfully stroked his and snowy beard, which fell in thick masses on his long breast. This was one of his hours of relaxation, when the grimrior, throwing sterner thoughts aside, sought repose in presence and love of his children. Since the death of their mother, a softer feeling seemed to have crept into his heart, and his desire for their company in his leisure hours was oftener sought for.

It was a pretty picture, as they sat there, these young and beauteous maidens, and gazed with eyes of love upon a fond and doting father; the king and all his pomp were laid aside; in him they only beheld the kind protector and affectionate parent. They questioned him of the chase and of their brothers' prowess in the haunts of the wolf and the dens of the wild boar; of all the events of the day, and their adventures with the savage and terrible denizens of the forest, and of a hundred other things, which he playfully and laughingly answered with delight. Thus an hour passed away and they were still plying him with questions, when a trumpet sounded from the battlements of the castle, and summoned him to the banquet. He was waited on by a numerous train of slaves, who bent their heads to their breasts as he walked between them through the hall that led to the court. As females were not permitted to be present at their banquets, they had a separate apartment for their own use, and there Sybilla and her sisters were conducted by a certain number of vassals and a retinue of slaves.

As the King entered the court, his nobles, and chiefs and followers, to the number of two hundred, with their bronze spears and shields, were drawn up ready to receive him. Saluting them, he passed into the banquet hall, and took his seat in his accustomed place. His warriors followed, and each one, according to his rank, took his seat next the king. Above each chair, fastened in the wall, were the long, forked antlers of a deer, on which the slaves suspended the shields and spears of the warlike guests.

On either side of the king sat Congal and Cathal, his two sons. Both were in the full flush and pride of youth and strength, and bore a marked resemblance to the king, their father. Fergus, the bard, sat next to Congal, and after him came the chieftains and their sons who held rank and title under Melcho. The banquet hall was a long and spacious apartment, with long tables running the whole length, each table capable of seating a hundred guests. The king's was in the centre, and, seated on an oaken chair carved and fashioned after the manner of the times, and emblazoned with the royal



arms of Dalaradia, the monarch dispensed and honored his subjects with his presence, and slaves dressed in the Roman costume, stood and attended to his every want. Other every nation known, and wearing their national distributed throughout the hall and ministers.

There was a plentiful profusion of viands large, fat and savory salmon from the Shannon kept fresh in sweet and pure water until needed; silvery-speckled eels from the Bann and the Rossapenna, fresh and delicious trout, which ago gambolled in the waters of the Braid, and kinds of shell-fish, raw and cooked, which flavor to the feast, or a zest to the appetite. of venison, as tender and palatable as ever furnished; the head of the wild boar, roasted stones, and flavored with spices; veal, mutton, beef, dressed in various fashions by the different there in rich profusion and reckless abundance.

A horn of the wild bull, scraped so thin as and resting on silver feet, stood beside each they quaffed the invigorating mead and ale of or the rich vintage of Gaul and Iberia. ] Irish prince, lived in profuse magnificence, at the board was only equaled by his valor violent exercise of the chase, which they in morning, had given an impetus to their appearing and dainty morsels so plentifully placed appeared in a manner that would astonish the late epicures of the present day.

The repast was at length over, and the still the tables of the *debris* that remained, each guest whom he tended, a sparkling beaker. The king was first served, and rising to his ing horn studded with gems and gold in Laegari, son of Nial, the Ard Riagh of Ireland he did so: "May he follow in the footsteps the tread of his legions affright the wolfish

and the flag of the sun-god wave in triumph from Temora\* to the Alps!" A tempest of cheers shook the banners on the walls, and each warrior quaffed his wine with a fervent wish that the hopes of Milcho would soon be accomplished. No voice in the hall was louder than that of Fergus, the bard, as he joyfully responded to the toast of the king. The latter noticed him, and while a smile danced upon his lips, familiarly addressed him: "Fergus, methinks the old spirit is not dead in thee yet, and did opportunity offer, could'st harp as brave a battle hymn, or sound an onset as deftly and as fierce as thou did'st in thy younger days. Time, though it has laid its wrinkled hand upon thy brow, has not dimmed thy warlike spirit nor chilled thy heart to stone at mention of the name of Nial!"

"Milcho, son of a long line of Dalaradian kings," answered the bard, rising and bowing with graceful dignity to his chief, "I have followed thy father in his wars in Britain and Gaul; have sounded the onset when his fiery legions rushed to the embrace of battle against the Scandinavian and the Roman; have soothed him in his sorrows, when wounded on a bed of pain and encompassed by countless enemies, and have gloried in his triumph when their bravest and fiercest hosts fell before his conquering sword. I have sung his dirge and wept over the hero's grave, and when Milcho marched to victory with the great Nial, Fergus was by his side, and did not blanch in the flame and shock of battle. Did the Ard Riagh of Erie call forth the clans to-morrow, Fergus would be bound by duty, and by honor led, again by the side of his prince in the hour of danger!"

"I doubt it not, good Fergus," answered Milcho, pleased with his enthusiasm, which coincided with his own feelings, and found an echo in his heart. And looking around upon his followers, he observed a smile of satisfaction light up every countenance.

"But thou hast been to Leinster, Fergus," he continued, "and hast visited Tara. What news is stirring? Do our kinsmen contemplate any new conquests, or do they, like ourselves, re-

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\*Tara

main in idleness, fooling their time in the chase of the  
and wild boar?"

"The plains of Leinster are as peaceable, returned the  
as the new fledglings in an eagle's eyrie. The soul of Nial  
flown, and his son, Laegari, frequents the haunts and gro  
the Druids oftener than the camp or tented field. I have  
upon the grave of Nial, and poured forth the song of sorr  
over his fall."

"We have fallen on degenerate days, when the spears  
nobles are rusting, and the sickle is the only weapon used  
the lae l," cried Milcho with aroused passion, and grasping  
hilt of his dagger.

"And worse than all," resumed the bard, "the men  
Leinster are listening to the whining croon of a foreign  
outlandish priest that has come among them, who preac  
against the noble pastime of war; rails and anathematizes  
holy Druids and vestals; sets up a new and unknown God  
us to worship, and desires to overthrow Bel, our sun-god  
!"

"By the soul of Nial!" exclaimed the king, excitedly  
ing his sandaled foot upon the floor, "Can this be true?"  
"It is true, my prince," replied Fergus, "for I have  
and heard him."

"And did'st not strike the villain dead!"

"He was the guest of Dari, of Kildare."

"The drivelling dotard! As his years creep on, his  
becomes enfeebled with old age. The Druid's staff  
now befit him better than the chieftain's sword. But  
he that teaches such a creed, and dares to trumpet it unscathed  
in Erie?"

"One whom brave Nial brought in chains from Gaul, and  
Milcho's former slave and swineherd!"

"Now, by the great Bel!" exclaimed Milcho, springing  
his feet, and gazing sternly at the bard. "But this is  
strous. But that I know thy well-tried love for mine and mon  
good Fergus, I would think thee facetious, and cleave  
the chine for thy sorry jest."

"I do not jest, my prince, and no one mourns it more  
"What is his name, and when was he my slave!"

"He's called Patricius now, but when he herded swine upon Slieve Mis, all Dalaradia knew him by the name of Sicur!"\*

"Sicur!" exclaimed the king, falling back in his chair and covering his face with his hands. The name was passed from mouth to mouth, for though to the younger warriors he was unknown, many old men were present who had seen him in their youth, and by whom he was well remembered. All eyes were riveted on Milcho, who, downcast and immovable, sat wrapped in a deep and absorbing reverie.

"It is of him," said Congall, his eldest son, addressing a grey-bearded chieftain who sat beside him, "It is of him the Druids prophesied that he would bring woe and disaster on Erie."

"It is even so," replied the person addressed, "but so many years have elapsed since then, that we thought their prophecy had come to nought. It was before your birth, Congall."

"I have heard my mother speak of him, and of his goodness and obedience."

"Aye, he was a soft, timorous kind of womanish soul, and feared to disobey," replied the iron soldier contemptuously.

"What harm can one weak and puny man do to Erie or Dalaradia?" observed Cathal, "and yet my father seems ill at ease at mention of his name. I fear that frown upon his brow; it bodes no good to this Sicur, should he stumble in his path."

"Hush! he is about to speak."

Milcho rose from his chair, and pointing toward Fergus, who sat silent and abashed at the passionate storm he had unwittingly raised in the chieftain's heart, thus addressed him:

"Fergus, dost thou remember the day when the great Nial mustered the clans of Dalaradia by the shores of the Scythian Sea. when our marshalled hosts ranged around his green throne, the three tribes of Erin, to do battle against the Roman in Britain? Outnumbering all others were our Dalaradians in their brazen armor, their spears and helmets flashing in the sun; and where Nial stood, our captains, bards, druids and

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\* Sicur or Succot, the name he received at baptism in France, his birth place.

historians thronged. The number of our war vessels darkened the ocean, and their white wings, spread to the wooing breeze, looked like a flock of sea birds on the restless waves, while the sunny water was lashed into foam by the stroke of a thousand oars. As the king sat on his golden chair on the deck, the chief bard, seated in the prow beneath, striking his harp, chanted a battle song of Erin; and as the song rose up, the waters, the warriors, raising their voices and beating on their shields, made the coasts which were lined with shouting multitude, re-echo with the fierce music of their battle hymn. If thou hast not forgotten, Fergus, it would please me well to hear that song upon thy harp.

The old bard, who at first feared an angry outburst of passion from his master and looked timidly on his darkened brow, now seemed relieved of his fear; and taking the harp from the hands of a slave, cheerfully obeyed.

At first the notes were soft and low, melting and tender as the farewell of lovers, or the mother's song to her babe; by degrees they rose higher and higher, until the tramp of marching men could be heard, the fierce cry with which they rushed to the onset; the charge, the clang of steel, and the rude shock in the wild tempest of battle. The shout of victory resounded in triumphant tones, and the swelling chorus of the victors filled the hall, bounding in measured melody from the enchanter's harp. Then rose the piercing melody, sadly wail for the dead, whose sorrowful notes melted into the soul, and flooded the heart with anguish. It was of brief duration, and died away on the ear like the distant cry of the banshee on the breeze.

The grand battle hymn of the harper lighted up the breasts of Milcho and his warriors with a fierce joy. As the warlike notes swelled through the spacious hall, they grasped their daggers and waving them above their heads, joined in the refrain of the bard. A grim smile for a moment shone upon the darkened visage of the king. As the bard concluded and put aside his harp, he again arose from his chair and addressed them:

"Warriors of Dalaradia, this was the battle hymn that animated the troops of Nial the day we met the Romans in

Armorica, and brought them as slaves to our homes in Erinn. Among them was one, a pale and trembling boy, unfit to bear a spear or shield, and born to be a slave and swineherd. For years he watched and tended on the hills, and cared not to mate with those of his condition. Silent and reserved, he lived alone, his only companions the base and brutal swine. What god he worshiped or what creed was his, we never sought to know. One day we missed him from the hills, and searched in every gorge and pass, but could not find him; he had fled. In time he was forgotten, and now, after the lapse of thirty years or more, this slave, this swineherd, this Sicur, returns to Erinn to preach us a gospel of peace and slavery, and overthrow our god!"

A murmur of astonishment rose in the hall as Milcho fiercely delivered the last words. Most of the young warriors had never heard the name before, and scornfully laughed in derision.

"And now, men of Dalaradia," continued Milcho, his fierce nature gleaming in his eyes, "Will you forsake the gods of your fathers, and bend in homage to strange gods at the behest of the meanest slave?"

"No! Bel and Crom are our gods; we shall have no others!" the warriors shouted.

"Then swear by the holy sun, the winds and the elements, that you will never forsake the shrines of your fathers."

"We swear," they shouted, brandishing their skeins and shouting in such loud tones as made the rafters tremble.

"It is well," answered Milcho, resuming his seat, "Leinster may forget her glory and embrace new idols, but Bel shall still remain the god of Dalaradia."

Calling to a slave to replenish his wine cup, he took a long and deep draught; and after listening to a few airs from Fergus' harp, left the banquet hall and retired to his apartments for the night.

While the tumult, caused by the loud oath which the warrior had taken for Bel, was at its height, one youth remained a silent but deeply interested spectator of the scene. He stirred not when the others arose and swore, but remained unobserved and silent. This youth was Mohon, the young chief of Angher in Tyrone. He did not take the oath.

## CHAPTER III.

### LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM.

"Alas! I have no words to tell  
The loveliness of loving well."

—Edgar Allan Poe.

After the departure of the king, many of the guests, wearied with the fatigues of the day, following his example, left the banquet hall; but many of the young chiefs remained, quaffing the sparkling wine and mead, clinking their drinking cups and pouring generous libations to the sun-god. The music of the harp mingled with the shouts of boisterous revelry and excitement, as Fergus touched the strings and breathed into them with fiery touch, the grand and soul-stirring melody of his impassioned heart. Now filling them with wild and warlike yearnings for battle, until their bosoms throbbed tumultuously for the strife; anon melting them to tenderness and tears, as his sympathetic hand, with weird and fairy-like fall, gently harped some old lay of love, devotion and chivalry, and accompanied it with his voice in the soft, flowing language of the Gael. The warriors paid him the highest honors, and the young princes, Congal and Cathal, plied him with wine, and sat beside him at the board. With the exception of the Arch Bard of King Laegari, Fergus was considered the greatest in Ireland; indeed, it was even hinted, that in music and song Dalaradia was as efficient, if not superior to, Cashel or Tara.

The ancient Irish harpers or bards wielded an immense influence; they were the counsellors of their princes, and no expedition or feat of war was undertaken without consulting them. They sat in the chair of honor at the festive board, and as the mead or wine cup went round, their plaintive love ditties or martial chants were listened to with delight. They were ever welcome in the ladies' bower; they headed the troops on the march to battle, with harp in hand and sword on thigh, singing the hymn of war, and many a swinging blow they struck to

Their skill was a subject of universal wonder, and even in after times, the bitterly anti-Irish Giraldus Cambrensis, praised the unequalled beauty of their music in the most enthusiastic terms.

The hours had deepened into night, and the noise of the revel was at its highest, when Fergus rose to depart. He was accompanied to the door by the princes, and preceded by a slave, hastened to his apartments in the eastern tower. There seating himself where he could obtain a view of the river, now flashing in the silver moonlight, with his harp by his side, he gazed upon the beautiful scene beneath. The trees, grand and stately in their proportions, and bedecked with summer foilage, were mirrored in the bright waters which lay calm and motionless as if hushed in sleep. Not a breeze rippled its silvery surface, nor throb of wave disturbed its placid beauty. Lovely in its moonlight glory, it seemed meet for the home of some beauteous Undine, while the shady woods that fringed its banks might be the haunts of Titania and her fairy elves, or where some dreamy lover might sigh his soul to the night winds, or enraptured bard drink inspiration from the scene. As the moon shone in unclouded splendor, and the stars, her hand-maidens, twinkled with joy at standing sentinel over that fair and enchanting valley, and smiled upon it in all their brightness beams, a man, suddenly emerging from the thickest part of the wood, his arms folded across his bosom, and his head bent downwards, with a slow and lingering step, gained the bank of the river, and standing in the moonlight, gazed upon its waters in silence and meditation. His dark and flashing eyes, brilliant as the stars that shone before him, the finely chiseled face, the broad and expansive forehead, and the decided tone and expression of his noble countenance showed that he was one prodigally endowed by nature, both physically and intellectually, with her grandest and proudest attributes. His long, dark hair flowed in wavy masses down his shoulders, and the short crommel on the upper lip, but yet in its incipency gave a manlier character to the rather effeminate and boyish face, and in a marked degree, enhanced its beauty. He was dressed in the costume of the period, his saffron-colored



mantle flung negligently, but in graceful folds, around him; an embroidered belt with golden clasps encompassed his waist, from which a long skein depended. He wore sandals, so light and elastic, that his footfall gave no echo even to the still moonlight; his frame was of powerful mould, tall, sinewy and muscular; and though but twenty summers had passed over his head, Mahon, the young chief of Augher, was the strongest of arm and limb, and the fleetest of foot in his native Tirowen, and the most accomplished and successful competitor at the Taltain Gares of Tara.

Communing with his thoughts, he stood for some moments on the sloping banks, gazing dreamily on the stream below; then, as if moved by some sudden impulse, he looked in the direction of the castle, whose high towers shone fair in the moonbeams. He could still hear the sounds of revelry ringing from the banquet hall, and the loud laugh of the warriors as they continued the carouse. With a disappointed look, he turned aside and slowly paced to and fro the open space between the trees that shaded the river's bank. Suddenly the sweet notes of a harp fell upon his ear, and pausing to listen, the voice of Fergus was heard blending with his instrument, singing a song in praise of his chief, the Lord of Dalaradia. He had wedded the words to that sweetest of all old Irish airs, "The Colun," an air, that even at the period of which we write, was ancient; its origin being lost in the twilight of antiquity.

## SONG.

### I

"To the chief of Emania of conquering name,  
We will sound the loud-harp to his glory and fame,  
And though feeble the hand that now sweeps o'er the strings,  
'Tis of him and green Erin he lovingly sings.

### II.

While the rose of the valley blooms bright in the sun,  
While sea-ward the rivers exultingly run,  
While the mountains in grandeur soar high o'er the sea,  
Green Erin shall ever pay homage to thee.

## III.

Proud lord of Emania, undimmed is thy fame,  
 Dalaradia exults in thy pride and thy name,  
 And long as the Sun-god o'er Erie shall shine,  
 Praise, glory and honor and fame shall be thine."

As the song ceased, and the last prolonged note was yet vibrating on the air, a hand was gently laid on the shoulder of the youth; and starting from the trance, in which the melody had, for the moment, enchaind him, he turned suddenly round, and beheld before him the bright and beautiful form of Sybilla, her eyes laughingly looking into his, and the rosy blushes playing and dancing on her love-lit, dimpled face. Clasp- ing the maiden in his arms, and lovingly kissing her cheek, he led her to a rustic seat, under the shade of a spreading oak, overlooking the river; and seating her beside him, gazed long and earnestly upon her glowing face. This was their first clandestine meeting; and though in itself it was harmless, for their souls were pure and innocent as the snow-drop on the flower, both felt embarrassed, in their joy at meeting, their hearts felt too full for utterance, and they remained silent. Sybilla, with down-cast eyes, gazed upon the river, the deep blushes mantling her bright face, and mingling with its snowy whiteness; while her lover holding her fair hand in his, toyed gently with her raven tresses that fell in rich luxuriance to her rounded waist. As is generally the case in such situations, the lady was the first to break the silence. Timidly, half-raising her eyes to his, and in a voice that thrilled his very soul with the charm of its melody and music, she inquired if it was long since he left the banquet hall.

"No," he replied, "it seems not long to me now, but I did fancy the moments were laggard in their pace, and the moon crept slowly up the sky ere her beams lighted on Milcho's tower. But then my thoughts were full of thee, and that is my sweetest solace when not in thy presence."

"It looked, good Mahon, as if you had forgotten me, you seemed so absorbed in the strains of Fergus' harp!"

"I was absorbed indeed, but had not forgotten thee; I

listened to his harp, because its tones reminded me of thy sweet voice, my Sybilla."

"Nay, Mahon, you flatter as deftly as any of the lords themselves; and were I vain, and giddy of heart and head, thy praise might work me evil. As I have told thee; from my birth, my mother meant me for a vestal, and the Druid, Conra, taught me to disdain all praise and flattery of thy sex."

"I did but speak the truth, Sybilla; the untutored promptings of a fond heart are hard to be concealed."

"Then praise not so again; I'll rest content to read your dearest thoughts; I can trace them narrowed in your face, for Mahon, 'tis a brave and noble one."

"'Tis you that flatter now, Sybilla, and what your heart would hide, your love unwittingly has ushered to your lips. But thank the gods for this sweet hour of love and bliss, that gives, to me, the brightest gem in all Emania, the sweetest flower in Dalaradia!"

Sybilla, blushing deeply at what she considered her unmaidenly boldness, though sooth to say, it was but the innocent thought of her soul, hung her head in shame, and feared to look upon her lover's face. But Mahon had seen the love glance that lighted up her countenance, as she uttered the last words, and read the inmost recesses of her pure and guileless heart. His own beat in a wild delirium of joy and ecstasy; and as the impassioned words fell rapidly from his lips, drew her to his arms, and fondly clasped her to his heart. Gently disengaging herself from his ardent embrace, she resumed her seat; and, while her heart throbbed with a tumult of glowing love, flung back the truant tresses that wantonly wandered over her fair face. Taking her hand again in his, and encircling her waist with his arm, they gazed into each other's faces with all the fondness, truth and love, that burned within them, and which sprung from the great and absorbing passion that mastered their senses, and which they vainly endeavored to control.

As they thus sat, wrapped in their happiness and love, oblivious of all the world beside, and dreaming those bright dreams that come but once into the heart, a peal of laughter

rung from the banquet hall, breaking on the stillness of the night, and falling with discordant sound on the ears of the lovers.

"What is astir to-night, Mahon," inquired Sybilla, "that my father's followers remain so long over their wine?"

"Not much indeed, Sybilla; it takes but little to give our young chieftains an excuse for a carouse."

"But there must be something to cause my father to retire so early, and to tarry so long at the wine cup."

"'Tis scarce worth talking about, though your father did take it much to heart, and the young nobles helped to fan the flame of his fierce temper. Fergus, who but to-day returned from Leighlin, reports the advent of a foreigner in these parts, who teaches a strange creed, curses Bel and all our gods, and preaches to the people a doctrine which if adopted by them, will overthrow the ancient faith of our island, and cause us to bend in homage to an unknown and hidden God, whom we cannot see."

"Does he come with a large army and a multitude of ships, that my father should fear him; and is he marching on Dalarradia?" enquired Sybilla, becoming interested, for she, as we have seen, was a consistent and devout votary of Bel, the sun-god.

Mahon laughed mockingly, as he answered: "No, he comes with but twelve poor followers, as weak and harmless as himself."

"And who is he?"

"One, at mention of whose name your father's face turned pale, and in the presence of his chiefs and followers, trembled."

"What? my father tremble! he, the kinsman of the great Nial; whom he followed in all his wars and never blanched at danger or at death! Who can he be, thus favored by the gods, that pales the cheek of Milcho?"

"He is a Christian, and a former slave that herded swine for Milcho, on Sleive Mis; his name is Sicur."

"Then may the gods look down in pity on us; for our doom is sealed if this man is allowed to teach in Erie!" exclaimed Sybilla, raising her hands on high, and looking upward to the

heavens. A death-like paleness overshadowed her face, her eyes suddenly lost their lustre, her pulse ceased to beat, and she would have fallen at his feet, had Mahon not caught her in his arms; she had swooned.

Terrified at the sudden and unexpected change in his beloved, he remained irresolute for a moment or two, not knowing what to do under the circumstances, and bewildered and helpless; but as his senses returned, and the reality of his position burst upon him, he gently took her in his arms, and running down the steep bank of the river, bathed her temples with the cool water that flowed at his feet. She was soon restored to consciousness, and seeing Mahon bending over her, smiled upon him with gratitude and love. But his last words still rung in her ears; and as memory returned, a pang shot through her heart, and a look of grief settled upon her face.

"Let us return to the castle;" she said wearily, "my heart is heavy with woe, for this is a black, black night for Erie."

"You speak in enigmas, dear Sybilla, and why this weak and puny Christian should cause you and your father so much fear is something I cannot comprehend."

"You know not who he is, dear Mahon, or you too would fear him. But let us proceed, for I am faint and weak."

Leaning on his arm, he gently led her up the bank and seated her on the rustic chair where they had lately passed such a blissful hour, in the delights of love and the joyful comingling of souls.

"Here rest for a while, my beloved;" he said, "it is not late, the lights are still burning in the castle, and while the breeze, which is now fanning the river, brings back the roses to your cheeks, tell to me the mystery that surrounds this Christian, this Sicur."

"Know then, Mahon," she replied, drawing a long sigh, and speaking in slow and measured tones, as if fearful of being overheard, "know then, that this Sicur is he whom my father captured in Gaul, when he marched with Nial against the Romans, and of whom our Druids and Brehons foretold, that he would bring danger and evil to Erinn. Among a multitude of slaves who returned with the expedition, were two

whom my father retained in his service. One was a female slave, a Roman matron, named Sybilla. Her husband and children had fallen in defense of the Gaulish town which they then inhabited, and she, herself, would have been sacrificed by the infuriated soldiers, were it not for the interposition of my father, who saved her life. She begged of him to take her to his country, and she would be happy to become his slave rather than remain in Gaul, and risk the rude familiarities of the invaders. He consented, and, though of a strange faith, and worshipping strange gods and uncouth idols, my mother took her to her heart, and made her a companion, not a slave. She returned my mother's love tenfold, and to requite that love my mother gave to me her name. This Sicur, whom I fear and my father hates, was one of those who were brought by Nial to Erinn. Sybilla knew him in his native town in Gaul; he and his tribe were shunned, and his religion banned, for it was Christian. It was his lot to tend my father's swine when he first came to Erie; he was a slave, and the most timid hind that ever brushed the forest dew in Dalaradia, was blessed with a loftier and bolder heart. But he was obedient, silent and gifted with a wondrous facile tongue whenever he chose to use it. It was said he held communion with his gods at night upon the hills; that strange fires were seen, and strange noises heard at late and unseemly hours. The Druids warned my father that his presence would bring a murrain on the cattle and a pestilence into the land, if not something worse, were he not destroyed or banished from the country. They prophesied a thousand dire events, and among them the overthrow of Bel and the subjugation of Erie by the stranger.

"Sybilla, before she died, consulted her gods, and the answer was the same. With her dying breath she warned my father to beware of the Christian, for the Christian's success would be my father's ruin; that Milcho's name would fade away from sight, and his line no more be heard of in Dalaradia. I have heard the tale when on my mother's knee, and though my father may be stern of nature, I know that in his heart he dreads the coming of the Christian. Of late he has grown morose and dark to all but his children, and holds frequent

interviews with Conra, the dark Druid; and I, Mahon, though I trust in Bel, the god of our fathers, cannot help believing that some great calamity is about to fall upon our house.

Mahon, in spite of himself, felt a superstitious dread steal over him as Sybilla, in almost prophetic tones, gave utterance to the thought. But rallying himself in a moment, and wishing to dispel the gloomy and foreboding prophesy from her mind, he answered in a light and careless vein:

"The death-bed croakings of a female slave, Sybilla, and the selfish warnings of an ill-omened Druid, who fears perhaps the loss of his golden altar-vessels and the rich sanctuary in his grove, should not be thought of with fear, by the children of Emania. It was but a momentary weakness your father felt, caused by the long and rugged chase, and passed unperceived by many of the chiefs. He desired Fergus to harp the battle-hymn of Nial; and his eye kindled and his face glowed with the fire and energy of youth, as the warlike and familiar strains burst upon his ears. Rising from his seat, he called upon his warriors to drink to Bel, and swear undying homage to their sun-god!"

"Ha!" exclaimed Sybilla, her enthusiasm getting the better of her fears; "my brave father's spirit is not conquered yet, and will not while one true heart remains in Dalaradia. You have relieved me of my fears, Mahon, and taken from me a load of grief. And you and all the warriors swore to be true to the gods and traditions of the people?"

"All," answered the young chief, hesitating, and withdrawing his eyes from hers, which were now blazing with excitement, as she conjured up the banquet scene, "all but one, perhaps."

"Who was the recreant? Name him, that I may blot him from my memory!"

Again the youth hesitated. Too noble to be guilty of a subterfuge, and too brave to utter an untruth, he knew that his answer would probably decide his fate; and that the proud heart which had only melted to his, and which he had but so recently conquered, might be lost to him forever. Rising before him and standing erect in the moonlight, her dark eyes

flashing upon him, she looked like the very genius of her country, in haughty pride and beauty, as she impatiently awaited his answer. His lips moved but uttered no sound, and the rapid beatings of his heart could be distinctly heard by his companion.

"Speak, Mahon!" she impatiently exclaimed; "or does it blister your tongue to name the traitor's name?"

"Sybilla," he at length answered, the color which had died away from his face returning, "the chief who did not join in the noisy tumult of the throng, though young, has never stained his escutcheon, and needs not to swear his fealty to his god or country, for it is centred in his heart. And though he did not swear, he is no recreant or traitor, and stands before you, Mahon, Chief of Aughur!"

The consternation that this admission caused in her heart, was plainly visible on her features. The flush forsook her cheek, and for a moment she believed that she had given her love to a traitor. Her pride was humbled, her self-esteem abashed. But when she looked upon the handsome and manly countenance, glowing with love and fervor before her, a mingled feeling of doubt and certainty took possession of her mind; and, as she hesitated, the struggle between love and pride raged furiously in her bosom.

But love conquered. Controlling her emotion, and laying her hand gently on his shoulder, she asked in a kind and subdued voice:

"Mahon, tell me why was this."

"It was, Sybilla, because my heart was not in the banquet hall; it followed my thoughts, and, in fancy, was present with you. I heard but the tinklings of Fergus' harp, and when it ceased, forgot all else save my dreamy thoughts. I awoke from my reverie, stirred by the clanging of their dagger hilts, as the chiefs poured forth their vows to Bel. Realizing my forgetfulness, and shamed at my rude conduct before the king, I stole unperceived from the hall, and sought the shelter of this friendly grove to cool my heated brow, and wait for thee, my beloved."

"O, Mahon!" cried the generous and impulsive girl, her



eyes brimming with tears, and a sweet look of love and hope beaming on her face; "O, Mahon! can you forgive me for doubting you? I have erred, but be not angry with your Sybilla."

"I am not angry, my dear love; but O, Sybilla! never doubt me again. It would pain my heart to think that you harbored one doubt of your Mahon's constancy."

"I shall never doubt again, but trusting in thy noble heart, believe and love."

She flew to the arms which opened to receive her, and with panting and throbbing bosom hid her face on his breast.

Suddenly a rustling among the boughs was heard, a dark shadow fell upon them, and a gloomy and sepulchral voice, in stern and decided accents exclaimed:

"Trust him not, Sybilla; he is a traitor to his country and the gods of his fathers, and is a serpent in the house of Milcho. Shun him as you would a demon, for he is in league with the Christian, who comes to destroy our faith and desecrate our sacred groves. When your father and the warriors of Dalarnia, swore to-night to protect our holy shrines, and pledged their lives to the sun-god, this fledgling of Tirowen shrank from the vow and hid his head among the leaves of the Braid. Sybilla, remember you are fated to be a vestal of Bel. The gods have given warning of the approach of the Christian dog, and they who aid or abet him or his followers, on them shall vengeance and retribution descend. Spurn this viper from your path; remain true to your gods; or on you and your house sorrow and affliction shall fall. It is a priest of Bel, a servant of your god, that warns you thus of danger. Fly to your father's house, and in your prayers remember Conra and his love and zeal for you and yours."

The terrified maiden gazed upon the dark and forbidding face of the Druid, whose long beard hung in thick and grisly masses to his knees; and as he spoke, she felt her heart sink within her, and a spasm of pain scorch its very core. The awful charge of being a traitor, and a confederate of the Christians, if not a Christian in reality, which he hurled against her lover, and the fearful denunciation which he ful-

minated against those who abetted or protected them, filled her soul with horror; the doubts which she, but a few moments before, entertained of Mahon's perfidy now returned with redoubled force; and spurning him from her with a wild and fierce energy, she uttered a scream and ran, like a frightened deer, to her father's castle.

Mahon, astonished and bewildered at the sudden change of events, could scarcely believe his senses. The sudden appearance of the Druid, breaking so unexpectedly on his happiness, and annulling it in the very strength and vigor of its bloom; the changeful and precarious moods of Sybilla, so strikingly illustrated within the last hour; and the fearful charges and forebodings of the Druid; all these combined, served to fill his mind with a gloomy feeling bordering on frenzy, and rendered him, for the moment, incapable of action. His first impulse was to follow Sybilla, when he became conscious of her absence; but as he looked in the direction of her flight, she had disappeared. His next was to confront the Druid, and, if need be, grapple him by the throat until he had disclaimed the foul and loathsome falsehoods he had uttered. But as he turned to the spot where Conra had but a moment before stood, he found to his utter chagrin and disappointment that he, too, had disappeared. Laden with sorrow, and a hundred fearful forebodings tugging at his heart, the young Chieftain of Angher pursued his way, slowly and with leaden step, toward the castle.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE DRUID'S WARNING.

King Dathi assembled his Druids and Sages,  
And thus he spake them:—"Druids and Sages,

What of King Dathi?

What is revealed in Destiny's pages,

Of him or his? Hath he

Aught for the future to dread or to dree?

Good to rejoice in, or Evil to flee?

—*Mangan.*

Milcho, after leaving the banquet hall, paced up and down the floor of his apartment with quick and hurried step and a mind ill at ease. A frown was on his brow, and ever and anon he gave vent to his thoughts in words, uttered with fierce and rapid energy. Stern and bold as he was by nature, unknowing human fear, and reckless in field or foray of his life, despite his utmost efforts he could not shake from his heart the fear and foreboding which the name of his former slave aroused. All the evils foretold by the Druids, should he return to Erie, flashed on the chieftain's mind and filled his fierce heart with a wild and indescribable alarm. The remembrance of a dream which he had when Sicur was his slave returned with startling vividness now, and he shuddered as it rose before him. He had dreamed he saw his swineherd come into the castle, and flames of fire appeared to issue from his head. Milcho thought that the flame broke upon him to burn him, but he drove it from him and it did him no harm. His sons and daughters were with him, and it seemed as if it consumed them entirely, and their ashes were scattered all over Erinn. He called Sicur at once and told him of his vision, which the slave boldly interpreted to him:

"The fire which thou sawest on me is the faith of the Trinity which burns within me; and it is this faith which I shall hereafter preach unto thee, but thou wilt not believe. Thy sons and thy daughters they will believe, and the fire of grace shall consume them."

It seemed as if these words were branded in burning characters upon his heart; he tried to forget them, but they would not down. Angrily stamping his foot, he cursed the hour that first put him in possession of the slave; and upbraided himself for not having transixed him with a spear for giving them utterance.

"Why is it," said he aloud, "that I, who have never quailed before the stoutest Roman or Scandinavian that ever bore spear or shield, whose arm has ever been with the mightiest in battle, and whose vote ever first in the councils of King Nial, and at whose call a thousand brands would flash in the valleys of Dalaradia, tremble at mention of this slave, this swine-herd, this Sicur? There is a feeling in my breast which all the wine of Iberia cannot drown; a gloomy and despondent thought in my soul which overshadows it with its intensity and freezes within the life-currents of my heart. It is ever present, in my lonely hours, in the chase, or in the banquet hall; and in my dreams the form of this Christian slave looms up before me to mock me with his presence. I fear there is a shadow hanging over my house which bodes great evil to mine and me. The gods are angry, and it may be the thunders of their wrath will fall on Dalaradia. Have our vestals forgotten their vows, or have our holy priests been false to Bel and profaned his sacred groves? But were it so, on them would fall the vengeance of the gods, and not on me; for they are just, even in their anger. Conra has foretold strange things would come to pass, if he, the Christian, should again revisit Erie. The thought was never absent from my mind since first he uttered it. And now that he has returned, I feel the darkening shadow on my head with ten-fold force and vigor. It robs me of repose; and, sharper than the maddened she-wolf's fangs, excoriates my breast. The raven croaks his hated name by night, and every hour of waking life is haunted by it. I am encompassed by his spells, and fear he comes to work the ruin of my house; and that my halls, where now the sounds of mirth and minstrelsy are heard, shall soon be desolate, and wake no echo but the wail of the wind, or the ill-omened scream of the Banshee."

Striking his forehead with his hand, and pausing abruptly in his walk, he remained motionless as a statue for a while, with his eyes cast on the floor. Fergus, whose apartment was in close proximity to the king's, now touched the harp, and its strains fell distinctly on his ears. It was a wail or song of sorrow for the dead, whose piercing tones fell upon the heart of Milcho, with sorrowful emphasis, and sounded to him like his own funeral dirge. Brushing the cold moisture from his brow, he flung himself on his couch, and, feverish and excited, hoped to drown his troubled thoughts in sleep. But Sicur "had murdered sleep." Restless and uneasy, he lay through the weary hours of the night, waiting and watching for the first glimpse of dawn. And when the morning sun shone at last on the mountain tops, and beamed upon the pleasant valley and waters of the Braid, it found him still sleepless, feverish, wearied and unrefreshed.

Descending from the tower, and summoning one of the sentinels, who kept watch and ward upon the walls, he ordered his horse. A splendid and high-mettled charger was led before him, and vaulting on his back, he plunged the spur into his flanks and rode off at a headlong gallop to the forest.

It was noon when he returned. Sybilla met him at the gate, and marked with sorrow the changed look and care-worn countenance of her father. He saluted her in his usual affectionate manner, yet did not pause, as was his wont, but hastily directed his steps toward his apartment. Two slaves waited on his call, bearing refreshments, of which he sparingly partook; and having dismissed them, rose from the table; and in the same restless and impatient manner, as on the previous evening, commenced pacing up and down the floor. Two hours passed away, and wearied with the long and rugged ride of the morning, and the sleepless vigil of the night, he felt his eyes grow heavy, and, seeking his couch, found at last a solace from his thoughts in sleep.

The night was windy and dark. A thick roof of cloud hung angrily and menacingly over the water of the Braid. The lights were out in the castle, and silence reigned within its walls. As the gloom of night thickened, and the wind in-

creased, whistling drearily through the woods, a dark, muffled figure, slowly and cautiously descended from the Eastern tower, and with noiseless step, entered the court, and quickly gliding through the gloom, passed the sentinel at the gate unchallenged, and stepped into the darkness. Pursuing his way along the river bank with familiar and easy tread, the castle was soon left far behind; and the noise of a brawling torrent fell on the ear of the wanderer, as he journeyed on. The impenetrable darkness of the gloomy woods, grown denser and more entangled as he advanced, was occasionally lighted by quick and vivid flashes of lightning; and as they played momentarily, and in fantastic circles around him, flashed to his view a wild and weird scene, which, at such an hour, might well strike terror to the stoutest heart. As flash succeeded flash, and the rumbling thunder echoed and rolled from cliff to cliff, drowning the noisy roar of the torrent and the winds, he could distinctly see before him, as the angry fluid played around its summit, a huge and lofty mass, the upper portion of which, to an immense height, presented nothing but irregular masses of naked stone, formed into monstrous precipices, or scooped out into frightful chasms. Some coarse heather adorned its ragged side, in bold contrast with its barren top; while, with a roar, which for a moment, made him shudder and draw back in alarm, a torrent gushed from the acclivities above, and, falling from a fearful height, over a ledge of broken rocks, that looked as if it had been rudely torn into every imaginable shape, by some awful convulsion of nature, suddenly burst into a foaming basin below, from whence, after fretting and chafing on the pebbly shore, it found an outlet into a serene lake, margined with trees of vivid green. Huge oaks, that had endured the storms of centuries, gnarled, moss-grown and gray, but still vigorous in strength and beauty, rose majestically over its waters, proudly raising their giant forms to the clouds, as if in defiance of the elements.

Drawing the folds of his cloak closer around him, and following a path which suddenly diverged toward the East, and which was plainly indicated to him, by a fierce flash, he proceeded in the direction which it led. He had reached a dark

and massive grove, whose velvety carpet of verdure yielded to his tread, and gave no sound to his footfall; when, suddenly, the storm became hushed and still; the lightning ceased to play; the thunder died away in the distance; and, unable longer to track the path, he stood, irresolute and appalled; lost in the inky darkness with the roar of the torrent in his ears. A gloomy dread crept over him, and superstitious fears rose in his heart. He thought he could distinguish ghastly and unearthly voices, mingled with the sound of the waterfall; and once he was startled by the piercing cry of the Banshee. By a violent effort of will, he tore himself away from the spot, to which he had seemed rooted, and endeavored to grope his way among the trees, that thickly studded the grove. But it was in vain; cold drops of perspiration stood upon his brow; and believing that he was surrounded and entangled by the spell of some evil spirit, he leant against a tree, agitated and lost in doubt and perplexity.

As he thus stood, a light burst on the darkness, revealing to him the path which he had been vainly endeavoring to pursue. A torch held by some one whom he could not see, and whose form, probably, was lost among the intricate mazes of the trees, seemed by its motions to invite him to follow; and eagerly starting after it, he muttered as he went:—

“Thrice fortunate is the hour that sends me such a boon. For this, thy altars,\* Heus, shall smoke with many a sacrifice!”

The midnight star was setting over the grove, as following the friendly light, he reached the termination of the path, and stood before the colossal gateway of a temple. For a moment the torch flashed upon its towers and pillars, and then disappeared within its recesses. Drawing from his cloak a small trumpet, he blew a shrill blast to announce his presence. Before its echoes had died away, the huge gates swung on their hinges; and by the dim light he discovered the figure of the grim porter, his face hidden in a dark robe, who, in a gloomy-toned, sepulchral voice, demanded: “What man art thou who seekest admission into our sacred groves?”

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\* Heus, the Jupiter of the Celts.

"I am Milcho, the king of Dalaradia."

"What dost thou seek?"

"I wish to consult the wise and holy Druids of the land, to whom all mysteries are known."

"Enter."

The light disappeared; Milcho felt a hand, cold as death, seize his own; and, submitting to the direction of his invisible guide, he advanced along an avenue of oak trees, whose roof of branches was so dense as to exclude even the twinkle of a star, into the impenetrable depths of the woods. Utter darkness reigned around; his companion remained silent, as they slowly proceeded. An hour seemed to have elapsed, when suddenly, Milcho felt the hand which held him, loose its grasp; and a voice as from the dark air overhead, exclaimed:—

"Advance!"

As the accents died away, a faint and spectral light began to glimmer fitfully through the giant trunks and branches of the trees; and he found himself advancing alone, between two rows of huge, upright rocks, which formed an avenue, skirted on either side, and domed over by the boles and gnarled boughs of the dark immemorial oaks of the grove. Then, as the light, sometimes radiating from above, sometimes flashing in fitful glares from the silent depths of the woodland, struck across his path, he perceived now some hideous shape swinging from the trees anear; now some awful face, taking form for an instant on the back ground of gloom, and then disappearing in the darkness; and heard, far away, mysterious voices, cries of torture, ululations of grief, accents, stern and deep-toned, as those of judgment, mingling with wild cries of enthusiasm, the clash of cymbals, and sound of feet careering in dances, whose fury seemed to quicken and intensify, as if in some insane rite, whose ministers, abandoned to inspiration, sought exhaustion or death.

Surrounded by such gloomy sights and sounds, the warrior king advanced, not undisturbed by supernatural terrors, until he at length arrived at the inner gate of the temple, in the heart of the forest, convenient to which a huge circle of colossal stones appeared; in the centre were vast altars, on one of



which a sacrificial fire was burning, which shed its sombre illuminations around the dark, mournful, silent circuit of the wood. Here the white-robed Druid, Conra, solemn-faced and snowy-bearded, confronted him.

Milcho was about to speak, when the Druid said:—

“Hail, Milcho of Dalaradia! Well art thou known to us, mighty warrior, in whose track the wolves have often followed, and whom the ravens knew afar, when, with Nial, you visited the plains of Gaul. Thou hast come to the sacred retreat of the wise men, to attain a knowledge of your destiny, and of him you fear,—Sicur the Christian.”

“Thou hast spoken truly, Druid,” replied the king.

“Await thou here, and when yonder star has sunk behind the woods, thou shalt learn from me the mysterious secret,” returned the Druid, pointing to a bright star, which was slowly descending through dark clouds, toward the distant line of the forest.

In the interval which elapsed, the king, who remained alone, leaning against the gigantic portal of the temple, looking sometimes to its interior, and again toward the gloomy openings of the wood, was conscious of a series of scenes, a series of sights, wild, strange and awful.

By the glare of the great sacrificial fire, which rose from the central altar of the vast and uncouth structure, he first perceived a figure, naked and bound, hurried by a number of dark-robed forms, to a wooden cross; and presently saw it elevated and nailed thereto. Piercing shrieks rang through the woods the while, and still louder, when the ministering figures transfixed the doomed man with arrows and lances. Then it was, that while he was convulsed with the death agony, the chief Druid advanced, and appeared to take a divination from the convulsed countenance of the human victim, whose cries were, meanwhile, drowned by a company of black, naked figures who, with wild eyes and streaming hair, danced round the neighboring altar fire in mad tumult; singing songs of incantation and death, and wildly clashing brazen cymbals over their heads.

At length a sound like thunder announced the termination

of the dread rite ; something like a black screen or mass of rolling cloud suddenly hid the altar fire, and surrounding scene from his eyes ; darkness filled the temple ; but looking beyond it he perceived the star had set, and again Conra, the Druid stood beside him.

“What say the Gods, oh Druid ?” inquired Milcho ; “Shall this Christian work me evil, and shall his spells render my days brief in the land ?”

“Oh, Milcho, king of Dalaradia,” exclaimed the Druid, “the Gods are angry with thee. Thou hast broken thy vow to Bel, and given not thy daughter, Sybilla, as a vestal to the God. To punish thee for thy perfidy, he has decreed that the Christian shall undo thee, and bring calamities upon thy house, if thou dost not repent and do his will. Even now the spell is working, and she, who should be the bride of the Gods, is affianced to one, who is, or will soon be, a Christian—Mahon, the chief, who refused the oath to Bel, last night in the banquet hall. The Christian is wending his steps hither, and will soon confront thee. If thou permittest Mahon to live, and bringest not thy daughter to our sacred groves, before the sickle reaps the corn, that is now ripening above the ground, thy spirit shall have passed from the earth, to the eternal world, where the God Heus reigns, and receives the souls of warriors.”

As he spoke a great wave of air passed, liked a mournful sigh, over the lonely valley ; and Milcho, who had vowed in his heart to follow the counselings of the Druid, and avert the anger of the Gods, by sacrificing Mahon, and delivering Sybilla to the Druids on the morrow, departed, guided by the faint beam of dawn, which already began to flush the thick clouds eastward.

But when he reached the castle, the young chief of Aughur had disappeared !

## CHAPTER V.

### SYBILLA'S MIDNIGHT CONFERENCE WITH HER FOSTER SISTER.

Love's sunshine and grief's shadows came  
And passed from heart to heart.

—*C.*

I saw my lady weep,  
And sorrow proud to be advanced so  
In those fair eyes, where all perfections keep.  
Her face was full of woe;  
But such a woe, believe me, as wins more hearts,  
Than mirth can do with her enticing parts.

—*Dowland's Book of Songs* (1600)

When Sybilla fled from Mahon and the face of the angry Druid, frightened and panting she reached the gate of the castle, and eagerly demanded admittance. The sentry, recognizing her voice, immediately undid the fastenings, and saluted her as she entered. It was known all over Dalaradia that Milcho's daughter was destined to become a vestal; and on this account, apart from the homage and respect due her royal blood, she was looked upon with reverence, as one who would soon be the bride of Bel, and rank next to the Druids. She had therefore free ingress and egress to and from the castle at all times, unchallenged and unquestioned; believing that, being under the special protection of the gods, no harm could befall her, and she might roam at will when and where she pleased. Therefore, it was no matter of surprise to the soldier on guard to see her astir at so late an hour. She was much given of late, to wandering alone by the banks of the river long after the twilight had fallen, sometimes with Una, but oftener alone; and if she did seem perturbed in mind on this night, the sentry, if he did at all perceive it, probably attributed it to some more than human feeling preternaturally imparted to her by the gods.

Placing her hand on her heart to still its tumultuous beatings, she paused as she gained the court, and looking toward her apartments beheld a light still burning. She knew it was left there by the faithful Una awaiting her return; and she blushed to think what fancies would flit through the heart of her friend, while wondering at her long absence. She soon felt calmer, however, knowing that she was safe from the pursuit of Mahon when she had gained the castle; and smoothing back the long ringlets, which had become entangled around her face in her hasty flight, she slowly and noiselessly stole to her chamber. The door was ajar, and seated before a small lamp which burned on the table, she observed Una, her face flushed and her bosom heaving tremulously. A gentle knock announced her presence, but caused the fair girl to start in alarm from her seat, and gaze with wondering eyes around her. Softly whispering her name, she approached, and Una rushed into her arms. For a moment they remained thus. Neither spoke, and each could hear the beating of the other's heart. Sybilla, gently disengaging herself from her loving embrace, fastened the chamber door and sat down beside her foster-sister. She was about to open her heart to her friend, and, though shame was eating at its core, and it was now again beating rapidly with excitement, confide to her the cause of her absence, and all that had passed between her and Mahon; for she doubted not that Una had kept a lonely vigil anxiously awaiting and praying for her return.

But before she could speak, Una, taking her hand in hers and looking timidly in her face, while her voice trembled and her cheeks suffused with blushes, said:

"Dear Sybilla, can you forgive me for my perfidy to you?"

Sybilla, lost in conjecture at the purport of the question, and embarrassed at the strange and unexpected manner of Una, knew not what to say, and for a moment did not answer. Her foster-sister, misinterpreting her silence, dropped the hand she held, and while the glow on her cheek faded to marble paleness, again repeated the question, and in a voice that went to the very heart of her friend.

"Sybilla, will you not forgive me? It is my first fault!"

"What have I to forgive, dear Una?" she at length said, subduing her astonishment and passing her arm around the young girl's neck. "I know not what you mean."

"Oh, Sybilla! I never deceived you before; and now, when I read forgiveness in your look, I will tell you all. I know you have been troubled about my absence, and that you have been in search of me until now. But the time passed away so happily that I heeded not the lapse of time, and hearing the honeyed words of him whom my soul cleaves to, did not deem it late until all the lights in the castle were extinguished, and the moon was waning far in the west. Even then his fond solicitations bound me to his side, and, happy in his presence, my heart beat with a wild revel of joy and gladness, forgetful of all else in the world beside; even of you, Sybilla, who were suffering an agony of suspense at my unmaidenly absence."

"But of whom do you speak, Una? I am lost in a wilderness of doubt and anxiety."

"Oh, Sybilla, do you not know? Can you not guess? Your brother."

"Congal!"

"Yes. Congal," whispered Una in her ear, her heart fluttering with emotion, and hiding her face on Sybilla's breast to conceal her blushes.

"And does he love you, Una? Has he plighted to you his vows?"

"He loves me, Sybilla; and has given this to me as a pledge of his love;" and taking from her bosom a golden brooch, studded with gems, held it to her view.

"And, Una, do you return his love as pure and faithful as he gives his to you?"

"I do, Sybilla, with a heart as warm and true as ever vestal worshipped Bel."

"Then may you be happy in his love, and may the gods shower down their choicest blessings on you, sister. You are worthy of a brave man's heart, and Congal's is the brightest pearl in Dalaradia."

"I scarce can realize my happiness, Sybilla; and were it

not for keeping the secret so long hidden from you, not a shadow would cross my heart. To-night, missing you from the castle, I went in search of you; and thinking you had gone to the cairn beside the pillar tower, where we had often sat at nightfall, I hastened thither, but could not find you. Then fancying that you were loitering on the river's bank, I turned to seek you there, and in the little grove that intervenes I met with Congal. You know the rest; and now, Sybilla, my more than sister, kiss me, to seal your forgiveness for the fear and trouble I have cost you."

Sybilla imprinted a warm kiss on her ripe lips, and Una's eyes sparkled with love and happiness.

A deep sigh involuntarily stole from the breast of Sybilla as she gazed on her beautiful face.

"You did not cause me any fear, Una; and since you have opened your heart to me, I will be as confiding, and tell you that I also have been absent since twilight, and that this night has been the happiest and most miserable of my life;" shading her face with her hands as she spoke, to hide from her thoughts the terrible scene with the Druid, which her fancy conjured up.

Una gazed in speechless astonishment. Lost in her own happiness, she could not imagine that others could be unhappy, and only turned to look at her companion, as she bitterly pronounced the last words. By a violent effort controlling her emotion, and brushing her tears aside, Sybilla again addressed her:

"I do not blame you for the secret of your love for Congal, for I, too, must plead guilty to the same charge. But oh! would that he were as worthy of a maiden's love as my brother, or that his heart were as pure and true as it is hollow, false, and treacherous. I loved him, Una, with all a woman's trusting love, and gave to him my heart, and he repaid me back with soulless perfidy."

"Who?" cried Una, leaping to her feet, forgetful of all her hopes and happiness while gazing on the agonized face of her friend.

"Mahon, the Prince of Anglur," replied Sybilla, with slow and emphatic utterance.

Una stared doubtingly and with an embarrassed look on her face. She knew that Mahon was the bosom friend of Congal, and the best-beloved of all the young chieftains at his father's court.

"It is true, Una," continued Sybilla, reading the thoughts expressed in her varying countenance. "It is true. I, who was ordained to be a vestal and a daughter of the gods, forgetful of my father's promise to the Druids, and my own; burning with a love I never felt before, gave my heart to-night to one who is a—Christian!"

Una started in horror at the name, and involuntarily drew back as Sybilla pronounced the hated word. The latter perceived it with pain, for she felt sure of the sympathy and love of Una, and, while the action shot a pang through her heart, continued:

"Blame me not, dear Una, until you have heard me. I was deceived, and did not know that such a brave and manly form could hide a perjured heart. He was the boldest in the chase, the wisest in council, the bravest in the field, and the gayest in banquet hall or bower. His praise was sung by bard and minstrel, and a hundred maidens sighed for his love. But he said he loved but me alone. I listened to his sighs, and while the tempter's spell was on me, gave ear to his self-pleadings. We met on the river's bank to-night, and in burning words he reiterated his vows to me. My soul was entranced by the delicious melody of his voice, and my heart made captive. I confessed my love as he held me to his breast, and his warm kisses rained upon my brow. It was a blissful moment, but too bright to last. It was a dream; and while his vows of love and truth still lingered on his lips, the vision fled, and I awoke to the stern reality that he was a perjured traitor. Oh, Una, Una! The misery of this night can never be effaced from my poor heart."

She staggered to a chair, for both had been standing for the last few minutes; and burying her face in the folds of her robe, sobbed as if her heart would break.

The compassionate and loving nature of Una was touched, and, flinging her arms around Sybilla's neck, she raised her head from the table, and kissed and soothed her with all the love and fondness of a sister. After giving vent to her passionate grief, the tears seemed to relieve her, and she repeated in detail the meeting with her lover, the appearance of Conra, the Arch-Druid, and his bitter denunciation of Mahon. Una listened, spell-bound and confounded at the fearful perjury of the young chieftain; but, with all a woman's instinct and tact, sought to glean some hope for her friend by casting doubt on the words of the Druid. Sybilla, in her surprise and perturbation, might not have caught the exact words of Conra; or, perhaps, it might not have been the Druid at all, but some rival, some enemy of Mahon's, disguised for the purpose of thwarting their love and annulling their happiness. But Sybilla was convinced that it was none other than the Arch-Druid himself. She had seen him a hundred times offer sacrifice in the sacred groves, and all her doubts regarding her lover's perjury were confirmed, by his suspicious conduct in shrinking from the oath in the banquet hall.

"No, no, Una, I cannot hope," she mournfully replied, as the fond girl, in her own gentle manner, endeavored to console her. "There is no hope for me. The judgment of the gods has fallen upon me, for I have been false to them in thought. I shall retire from the world, and in the groves of the vestals dedicate my heart to Bel, and at his altars forget my great shame and sorrow. To-morrow, I shall seek my father, and remind him of his promise to the gods and Conra. This time I shall not fail; and if a life of penitence and prayer can avert from our house the anger prophesied by the holy Druid, it shall be mine. My unholy love caused me to err; but now the scales have dropped from my eyes, and I see the path clear before me. You will be happy, Una, in my brother's love, for he is noble, true, and generous; I shall see you often in the groves when the Bealtinne fires are lit and the sacrifice burns on the altar. My prayers shall be offered for your welfare; and oh! may they ascend to Bel, and be the cause of untold happiness to thee and thine. When the first beams of



the sun-god kiss Slieve Mis, thy name will be on my lips at the altar; and when his last ray lingers on our holy groves, a supplication for thy house shall be wafted to his throne."

"Oh, Sybilla, Sybilla!" exclaimed Una, throwing herself into her arms, while the blinding tears almost choked her utterance, "why will you leave me?—I, who have been your sister and friend since childhood, nursed on the same knee and fondled at the same breast; who have ever loved you with the fondest love, and never until to-night lived one hour out of your presence. The gods may not be angry, but the Druids, who fear to lose the daughter of a princely house, and she the purest and brightest in Emania. That scowling Conra prophesies nought but evil, if from the king he gets not gold and jewels for his altars. Half the spoils your father brought from Gaul are his, and decorate his shrines; and now he wants the brightest gem in his possession. He cannot force an unwilling bride; and even if he could, your father has strength and power to oppose him, as King Nial did."

"Oh! speak not thus, Una, of the holy priests of Bel, or else some deadly evil will befall you. My father wishes me, I know, to take the vows, and I am ready. Even did he oppose Conra, he would fear the fate of Nial, who was overtaken by the vengeance of the gods in Gaul, and fell in the noonday of his pride and power. Una, it is my destiny; I feel it in my heart to-night, and all your love or remonstrance cannot change my purpose. I shall see my father to-morrow, and tell him I am ready."

"Well, then, Sybilla," exclaimed Una with passionate energy, and rising to her feet, "I also am ready. There will be two for the sacrifice; for where you go, I go!"

"Una, your love for me plays strange antics with your heart. Would you, after gaining my brother's love and pledging to him your vows, scatter these vows to the winds, and render him miserable for life?"

"I loved you, Sybilla, before I loved him."

"Granted, sweet Una; but remember you were not dedicated for a vestal since your birth. My father is your guard-

lan; and even did he consent to your desire, Conra might not approve of your entering the holy sisterhood."

The thought dampened her ardor and chilled her enthusiasm, when she brought to mind the many occasions when straying near the groves, she had been seen by Conra romping among the trees and chasing butterflies with child-like laughter and delight, while the more pensive Sybilla sat gazing on the river, or quietly rested under the shade of a sacred oak.

"I fear your conjecture is true, Sybilla," she answered, after a moment's reflection; "and I know not what to think or do. It does seem as if the gods were angered with us, and put the cup of happiness to our lips only to dash it and our hopes to pieces. The evening brought us love and happiness, but the midnight found us sorrow."

"Not for you, I hope, dear Una; your destiny leads you to a path where you will find love and happiness; and surely I, too, will find repose in being the bride of Bel."

"I feel weary, Sybilla; and though I cannot sleep, I feel eager to press my couch, and care not if I never dream of happiness again."

"Give not way to your grief, my sister; it will be but momentary, and in another's smile you will forget it, or at least deaden it of its sting. But do not tell my brother of my unholy love; for it would shame me to look upon his face again."

"I shall guard my tongue, Sybilla, so that even the subtlest promptings of your brother's love shall not drag it from me."

"Thanks, Una, for your promise; and now one prayer to Bel, and then good night."

They knelt facing the east, and poured out their hearts in prayer to their sun-god, Una praying for a surcease of sorrow, and Sybilla again vowing her life at his shrine. Little did they deem, as they retired to rest, that the cross of the Christian would soon slatter the idols of their god, and Christianity sit enthroned amid the ruins of their paganism!

## CHAPTER VI.

### SYBILLA'S WRATH AND MAHON'S GRIEF.

"Though my many faults defaced me,  
Could no other arm be found,  
Than the one which once embraced me,  
To inflict a cureless wound?"

*Byron.*

Mahon, after the sudden and abrupt flight of Sybilla, walked with slow and measured tread towards the castle. His heart was ill at ease, for a dark weight of pain and anguish was concentrated around it. The bright and dazzling hope of Sybilla's love, which, but a few moments before, had dawned upon him in all its reality and beauty, and filled him with so delicious a rapture, that he envied not the glory of the gods, had been so rudely snatched from him, that his mind was tossed in a sea of trouble, doubt and uncertainty; and he seemed bewildered and dazed by the sudden change in his prospects. The tranquil and serene beauty of the night accorded ill with his troubled bosom! The more he pondered on the unexpected event, which had so suddenly marred his happiness, and crushed his hopes, the more despondent he became; and, cursing the untimely interference of the Druid, and his own lack of energy in not confronting him to his face, and hurling back the dark and bitter lie in his teeth; with a firm resolution of vindicating his character to Sybilla, even if he should be obliged to enter the sacred groves, and drag Conra from the altar, on the morrow; he entered the precincts of the castle, and gaining his chamber, flung himself on a couch.

But sleep had forsaken his pillow. Restless and uneasy, despite his efforts to banish the dark thoughts which troubled him; and his desire to forget, in sleep, the painful forebodings which tortured him, he tossed feverishly on his couch, un-

til the first rays of the sun brightened the dew on Slieve Mis, and shone into his apartment. Then, when he had given up all hope of repose, nature succumbed to fatigue, and sleep settled on his eyelids. But it was troubled and unrefreshing. In his dreams he saw Sybilla waiting on the river's bank; and, as he approached, a bright smile illuminated her beautiful face, as with outstretched arms, she ran to receive and welcome him. But a dark shadow came between them. As he rushed to fold her to his heart, the black and frowning face of Conra intervened but with one arm encircling the waist of Sybilla, and, raising the other with menacing gesture, he in an angry manner, bade him begone. The Druid, his countenance writhing with malignancy and scorn, pointed in an opposite direction to the castle, and hissed into his ear, the word "traitor." Awakening with a start, he leaped from his couch; and, looking at the sun, was surprised to find that it had long ago passed over the mountain peaks, and was beaming almost in meridian splendor on the valleys below.

As the events of the previous night came back in vivid distinctness to his mind, and he remembered with painful accuracy the dark dream that had embittered his rest, a pang shot through his heart; and, seating himself at a table, and covering his face with his hands, he endeavored, long and earnestly, to shape out in his mind the path that duty prompted him to pursue. Distracted and lost in conjecture and doubt, he could arrive at no definite conclusion; and, wearied with his perplexities, and harrassed with the gloomy thoughts that tormented him, he started from his seat, and quitting the chamber, descended to the court, and passing quickly through the gate unconsciously, struck the path which led to the spot where he had last seen Sybilla.

As he neared the huge oak, whose gnarled boughs bent over the bank, and cast their shadows on the river, his imagination brought lovingly before him the form and face of her who had, but a few hours before, sealed his happiness, and afterwards heaped coals of fire upon his tortured heart, as if in mockery of his feelings, beneath the friendly shelter of its leaves.

It was the very spot on which they stood—the velvet verdure of the sward which, to his fancy, yet retained the faint impression of her footsteps, when the ill-omened Druid broke in upon their happiness, and uttered his dread and fearful denunciation. Seating himself beneath its sheltering shade, he gave a loose rein to his thoughts, and again conned over the events of the previous night. The river flowed by in all its impressive beauty and grandeur; the birds sang their love-songs on the trees; and the golden rays of the sun toyed with and wooed the tiny wavelets, with which the breeze, with throbbing undulations, begemmed its breast. All was calm, peaceful, and in repose and happiness, save the burdened heart and sorrowful soul of Malion. How long he thus remained, in gloomy thought and contemplation, he neither cared nor noted. Hours flew by, and still he remained in abstraction, and absorbed in reveriery; a prey to care and melancholy, when a rustling among the bushes behind him suddenly fell upon his ear. Brushing the damp dew from his forehead, which the violence and intensity of his sorrow-laden thoughts had gathered, he started to his feet; and, looking around, beheld, within a few paces of where he stood, the object of his thoughts, the cause of all his trouble and anxiety, the beloved of his heart Sybilla.

For a moment he doubted his senses, and placed his hand upon his throbbing brow, as if to collect his distracted thoughts. But there she stood before him, in all her beauty, grace, and majesty, the symmetry of her well-defined and commanding figure enhanced by the absence of the robe which had muffled her form on the previous evening, and looking more bright and lovely than ever. The blush of the rose which had crimsoned her fair cheeks at their last meeting had fled, but in its place a snowy whiteness shone, which seemed to impart a more radiant beauty to her cheek, and a brighter lustre to her eye. She spoke not, but as her glance met his, a red flush mantled, for a moment, her cheek, and then as suddenly died away, leaving behind a more snowy and pallid whiteness.

Bowing, until the eagle plume in his hat touched his knee,

Mahon bent before her, and summoning all his resolution for the effort, approached her. For a moment she stood irresolute, her varying color betraying the fickle promptings of her heart, which came and went, now clothing her face in sunshine and then darkening it in shadow. Mingled feelings of love and distrust, swept, with lightning rapidity through her heart, as they stood thus confronting each other; but so strong and powerful were the pleadings of love in his favor taken in juxtaposition with his weary and care-worn look, which plainly told the anguish of his soul, that, despite her firm resolution to Una to become a vestal, she was on the point of again forgetting her vow, and letting love obtain the mastery. But suddenly remembering the scene of the preceding night, and the awful words of the Druid, the smile dancing on her lip died away; a look of scorn and contempt took possession of her features; and, drawing back as if she feared pollution in his touch, haughtily ordered him from her presence.

"Leave me!" she exclaimed, throwing up her arms, her eyes flashing with indignant scorn, "Leave me, base wretch, faithless alike to thy god and me. Thy soul is perjured, and thy heart is false; thy tongue is honeyed, but its words are poisonous and deadly. Approach me not; touch not the robe of one who soon shall be a vestal of the gods. Get thee hence. Hide thee from my sight, and in the solitude of thy home atone for thy perfidy, thy sin and shame."

Mahon had approached to within a few feet of where she stood, but, as she began to speak, paused, and gazed timidly upon her. The withering denunciation with which she greeted him, blasted in his heart all hope of a reconciliation, and cast a darker shadow of despair around it. His resolution to approach nearer and to reason with her on the fatuity of her suspicions, faltered, and he stood spell-bound and speechless before her.

"Go," she continued, "base scion of a noble house, and tell your clansmen of Tir-Owen that thou wert the first chieftain that ever brought dishonor or disgrace upon them. And when at Tullaugh-Oge, the crown of thy tribe shall be placed upon thee, it will encircle the head of a traitor! Be gone!"

He had advanced to where she stood, and, flinging his arms around in his excitement, almost touched her shoulder, but, stepping back with a shudder, she shrank from his approach.

"Touch not a daughter of Bel," she exclaimed with angry energy, "my father has the power, and knows well how to punish a traitor. I have but to name thy perfidy and his vengeance on thee would be fierce and sudden as the lightning of Belus. Go, while it is yet time, for be assured, Conra will impart to him thy treachery and falsehood."

She turned with haughty and defiant mien, and casting a glance of scorn as she passed, took the path that led to the castle, and disappeared from his sight among the trees. Turning in the direction which she had gone, he caught a last glimpse of her ere she faded from his view, and while the last faint hope died in his bosom, muttered to the winds his farewell.

"Yes, Sybilla, I go; there is no more happiness for me here, when I have lost thee, thou moon-lit pearl of my soul. But may the gods deal with me in their anger, if I ever have been false to them or thee. No priest or vestal ever felt the flame or glowed with a purer love when kneeling at the holy altars in the groves than burned within my heart for thee. Thy love was dearer to me than fame, glory, wealth, or conquest, and now it is lost to me forever. I shall return to soothe my dying father, and then, in solitude, forget the vain and frivolous world. The hope was sweet that lured me on; but now 'tis vanished like the misty veil the sun rends from Lough Neagh. Farewell! and may the gods deal kindlier with thy heart than thou has done with mine!"

She disappeared from his sight as the last words escaped his lips; and, hurriedly passing between the trees, he emerged from the grove and stood upon the bank of the river. Long and earnestly he gazed upon its bright waters as they murmured at his feet; listened to the song of the birds as they fluttered from tree to tree; cast a glance at Slieve Mis as it towered in pride and splendor above him, crowned by the glory of the noon-day sun; and, heaving a deep sigh, as the tall towers of her home rose to his view, left the spot with a

clouded and melancholy heart, and silently wended his way to the castle. Summoning his retainers, he ordered them to prepare for their homeward journey immediately; and none of the chiefs being present in the court, the effects of the late revel, probably, detaining them in their chambers, he mounted his horse, and without taking leave of any of the inmates, in silence took his departure, leaving behind him his hopes, his happiness, and his heart, in the green woods of Dalarandia.

As Sybilla returned she met her father, as we have seen, after his morning ride, but a frown was on his face, and she did not dare to enter his presence until the cloud had passed away. Toward evening she stole softly to his apartment, and noiselessly entering, found him asleep on his couch. Again deferring her interview until the morrow, she rejoined Una, and recounted to her her second and last meeting with Mahon, but even while they blamed him for his treachery, they forgot not to offer up a prayer for his safety.

While they were engaged in their devotions, the object of their thoughts was far on his way to Tir-Owen, and Milcho was nearing the sacred groves of the abode of the Druids.



## CHAPTER VII.

### SYBILLA'S INTERVIEW WITH THE KING.

“—— Guards !

Seize this traitor and convey him to the tower,  
There let him learn obedience !”

—*Shakespeare.*

The meaning, then, of country, virtue, faith,  
Flashed on me lightning-like ; I pressed my brow  
Down on the way-side dust, and vowed till death  
My life to these. That was my bridal vow.

—*Aubrey De Vera.*

Feverish and unrefreshed, Milcho arose from his couch on the morning after his interview with Conra. A fierce passion of hatred and vengeance raged in his heart against Mahon, and he determined to summon his chiefs in council, and confront him with his perfidy. To arrest him at once and drag him before a tribunal, was the first impulsive thought that entered his mind ; but the young chief belonged to a noble house, and had a powerful following of clansmen, who would be no way tardy in avenging the insult cast upon his name by this high-handed and despotic proceeding. The old chief of Tir-owen, his father, had been the ally and comrade of Milcho ; and with him, had followed Nial in the Roman wars. They had been friends since youth, and rugged and stern as was the heart of the Dalaradian warrior, he shrank from giving pain to his ancient friend, and embittering his last days on earth by publicly proclaiming the perfidy of his son. These thoughts, however, soon vanished, and all his former sternness returned, when he remembered the dark and fearful words uttered by the Druid. The son of his bosom friend had betrayed his hospitality and love, and under the guise of friendship, had perpetrated a crime which, if not avenged, and speedily, would bring down upon his house a terrible retribution. He had dared to set at defiance the mandates of the gods, and en-

deavored to wrest from them a vestal. He had spurned the holy faith, which for countless centuries had been the guiding star of his fathers; and by his treacherous Christian spells, robbed him and Bel of his daughter. The thought almost drove him distracted, and he paced the apartment like an enraged tiger in his cage, muttering fierce maledictions against the author of all this wrong.

Stamping angrily on the floor, he stood for a moment impatiently awaiting an answer to his summons. A slave immediately appeared at the entrance, but involuntarily drew back with a shudder at the fearful expression of rage on the king's face; but an angry gesture soon recalled him to a sense of duty, and bowing lowly, he tremblingly approached his presence.

"Go," shouted Milcho, "and tell the warden to sound his loudest note from the walls, and ring the loudest bell, to muster the clansmen around the king!"

Frightened and appalled, the slave fled precipitately from the apartment to execute the command. But a few moments elapsed until the loud notes of a horn sounded from the battlements, and the quick, hurried tones of the alarm-bell broke on the startled ears of the inmates of the castle.

Springing from their beds, the warriors rushed for their arms; and wondering at the untimely and unwonted summons, hastily assembled in the court. Congal, in the absence of his father, took command, and sending Cathal with a chosen band of followers to man the walls, took his station at the head of the troops formed in the court-yard. While they thus stood in breathless expectation of the next event to occur, the king, with grim and scowling visage, appeared. All eyes were riveted on him, and, while they could not divine the object of the unexpected call to arms, knew by the cold and cruel look on his face, that something extraordinary was about to occur.

Their first surprise over, the old warriors, who had often stood by his side on many a field of danger, read in his countenance no signs of coming strife, either foreign or domestic, for well they knew that Milcho's soul shone in his face, and joy and gladness lighted up his eye at the prospect of battle.

with Gaul or Roman. While lost in conjecture, the young clansmen, who had never yet flashed their maiden weapons against mortal foe, believed that Laegari, their Ard Riagh, had at last awoken from his slumber, and following in the footsteps of his father, Nial, meant to emulate his glory, and tread in his path of conquest and triumph.

While all stood in expectation and surprise, Milcho advanced to the centre of the troops, and raising his arm, addressed them in his own fierce and impassioned manner. He commenced by reciting the wars of Nial, of his raids and forays in Gaul, and of the capture of Sicur, the Christian. Detailing the events of his captivity as far as he knew, in the valleys of Dalaradia, and of the slave's interpretation of his dream, he passed on to the prophecies of the Druids regarding him; how they foretold of his coming and of his second visit to Erie; and that he would, by his spells and incantations, destroy the ancient creed of the land. Conra, the Druid, had informed him on the previous night, of the second advent of Sicur, and in the sacred groves had offered sacrifice to Bel to stay the impending wrath which was threatened on the land, and the oracles of the gods gave warning that Sicur and one who was his accomplice, must die. There was a murmur of doubt and astonishment when Mahon's name was mentioned as an accomplice and a convert to the creed of the Christian; but their doubts melted when Milcho declared him to be a traitor, and told of his secret and dark designs against his daughter, Sybilla. All clamored loudly for his arrest, and that he should immediately be brought into their presence.

None were louder in their denunciations than Congal and Cathal, the king's sons. The former, at his own request, was permitted by his father to proceed to Mahon's apartment and with a guard, bring him and his retainers to justice. But consternation fell upon the king and his followers when Congal returned, after searching every nook and cranny of his chamber, and reported his fruitless search for the traitor. He had flown, and his couch was undisturbed, as if it had not been pressed since the night before the banquet. His retainers were also absent, and a pang shot through Milcho's breast as

the sickening and oppressive thought flashed upon him, that his daughter had also accompanied his flight; and Cathal, who stood beside him, was ordered to proceed to the tower and learn the worst. The apprehensions of his father were dispelled when the young chief returned to the court-yard and reported that none of his sisters were absent, and that Sybilla was anxious to learn the purport of the strange alarm that had disturbed the castle at so early an hour.

"'Tis well," replied the king, a grim smile passing over his face, "and now, warriors of Dalaradia, this insult upon our house must not pass unavenged. Congal and Cathal, to you belong the task of intercepting this renegade ere he reaches Tir-owen. Follow, and bring him back alive or dead. If alive, the day that witnesses Sybilla a daughter and a priestess of Bel, shall witness the ignominious death of the traitor. Follow him with blood-hound and beagle, and capture him, though it be on his father's threshold!"

Choosing a picked band of spearmen, and taking with them a pack of blood-hounds, the two brothers departed on their errand of vengeance; while their father, after dismissing his followers, with dark and gloomy brow, again sought his apartment in the tower, and summoned Sybilla to his presence.

The dark and lowering look on his face changed to a softer hue as she entered, and the stern lineaments melted preceptibly at her approach. He looked upon her face; it was pale and marked with the traces of recent suffering. His stony heart began to thaw, and taking her hand, he led her to a seat, but did not salute her with the fatherly kiss which she was wont to receive, nor did he show any further endearing demonstration of kindness towards her. His searching look seemed to read her very soul, and the harshness apparent on his brow, though he tried hard to conceal it, plainly told that her secret was not hidden from him, and that he was acquainted with her ungodly and impious passion for Mahon. Her cheeks were overspread with burning blushes, as the thought gained credence in her heart; and as she became convinced of the truth of her surmises, suddenly faded to an ashy paleness. Her resolution, which, until then, had buoyed her up, deserted her

in her moment of greatest need, and she trembled at the thought of the great sin she had committed. She dreaded her parent's anger, and would have thrown herself at his feet, confessing her fault, and begging for his forgiveness; but she seemed riveted to the seat on which she sat, fixed by the still fearful glare of her father's eye, and her limbs refused their office.

"Sybilla," he at length said, and his voice sounded harsh and discordant in her ears, "you, who are versed in the lore of the Druids, and learned it from Conra, a descendant of Nial, the Arch Druid of Ireland, and sovereign pontiff of the order of the Druids of Gaul, Britain and Scotland, know that we have always spurned strange gods, and kept the faith of Bel. You are also versed in the lore of your country, and know that the yoke of the Roman is on the necks of every people but yours. The Britain and the Gaul groan under their despotic sway; and there is no land washed by the sea that does not pay them homage, save Erin. For this we may thank the gods, to whom we have always been faithful; and now, Sybilla, knowing all this, and being educated from childhood to consider yourself a vestal of our day-god, will you, the first-born daughter of my house, the beloved of your father's heart, forsake our god, who has been the protector of our country and her glory, and embrace the strange and ignoble doctrine of these slavish Christians?"

"Father," she answered, now starting from her seat, and drawing herself up to her full height, while her eyes flashed and her words came quick, and with vehement energy, "Father, I have never been false to Bel; if, for a moment, I have erred in my love for one who was but a traitor, it was a woman's weakness, and it is over. But I never proved false to Bel, my god and the god of my fathers; I have been destined for a vestal, and never did virgin approach the altar more willingly than I shall. I am ready to enter the sacred groves, and it remains with you and Conra to name the day and the hour."

"Oh! Sybilla," exclaimed her father, clasping her in his arms, "your mother's soul spoke there." "Daughter of my

heart, you shall yet avert the sorrow that looms above my house; and by your prayers to Bel, and with holy sacrifices, render of no avail the machinations of these ill-omened Christian dogs who plot evil to mine and me."

"If, by obeying your will," she answered, kissing his cheek, "this can be accomplished, trust in your daughter, your Sybilla."

"Thou art my hope, my daughter, and to thee I cling for succour and support. Last night I discoursed with Conra in his holy shrine, and amid a scene that might well impart terror to the bravest heart, I heard from his lips the fiat of the gods. Misfortune and destruction beset my path if thou dost not become a vestal, and Sicur and the traitor chief of Augher be not sacrificed. This is written and cannot be annulled."

"Then I obey the gods, and from this hour I dedicate myself to Bel," she answered.

"My warriors are on the track of the traitor," continued Milcho. "He cannot escape the vigilance of Congal and Cathal; and Sybilla, by the glory of Bel, I swear that he shall be offered as a sacrifice to the gods, and burn on the altar of Conra on the day thou first becomest a vestal, and never yet did shrine glitter with more resplendant gems than I shall give to honor the bridal of the gods and thee. I shall seek the Druid to-morrow, and with a happy heart acquaint him of thy resolution, and when thy brothers return, we shall make preparations for thy advent into the sacred sisterhood. Embrace me again, my daughter, for thou has gladdened thy father's heart and infused a new life into his veins. Retire thee to thy chamber, and in secret ponder over the bright and glorious destiny that is thine."

Imprinting a kiss upon her cheek, he gently disengaged her from his arms, and throwing himself on his couch, relapsed into silence and meditation. Sybilla retreated to her chamber to commune with Una and impart to her the events of the interview.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### MAHON'S WEARY JOURNEY.

— Vainly I think  
In duty done to find content ;  
Each dawning day wakes me to shrink  
From life, from which the soul seems rent.  
— *Wm. Geoghegan.*

“ Who's there ? What light is that ? Wherefore com'st thou ?  
“ To comfort you and bring you joyful news ! ”  
— *Marlow's Edward II.*

As the turrets of Milcho's castle faded from view, Mahon, letting the rein fall on his charger's mane, and forgetful of all but his own bitter sorrow, left the noble animal he bestrode to pursue his own free way unchecked by bit or bridle. His retainers, three in number, rode at a respectful distance behind, and though they did not know the cause of his dejection, believed that something sinister had occurred at the castle to cause his sudden and abrupt departure. They had marked at starting the sorrowful and care-worn look that overspread his features, and at times the gloomy shadow that darkened his brow. They conversed in whispers, vainly striving to unravel the mystery and indulging in a hundred conjectures as to its origin.

“ I will wager a mether of stout ale, that that blue-eyed, golden-haired *Cailin*, Una, has something to do with our journey this evening, and with our chieftain's gloomy thought,” said one who seemed to be the oldest of the party, a perfect giant in strength and stature, and who soared a head above his companions.

“ It may be so,” answered his comrade on the right, “ but Carbre, to my thinking it was something more dreadful still.”

“ And what may that be, O ! wise Feilim ? ” questioned Carbre, laughing at the gravity with which he spoke.

“ He may have heard the Banshee last night and received

warning of his father's death; I myself, as I sat on the battlements, near midnight, saw ——”

“Your own shadow in the moonlight and ran dismayed to bed.”

“O! thou should'st have been a Druid, Feilim,” said the third of the group, “for thou art always prating of goblins and fairies, and banshees, and spirits, and extracting evil from every omen that appears. The hoarsest raven in the woods of Dalaradia croaks not more villainously than thou.”

“Did I not warn thee, Ibar, to beware of the wild boar in the woods of Angler? My advice was disregarded, but my forebodings became verified.”

“Ay, truly, thou art a great prophet! Thou can'st tell some ships will be lost at sea because storms frequently occur, and can'st prophecy that the hunter may sometimes be scratched in an encounter with the wild boar and wolf, and sometimes even with the red deer and elk.”

“Tell us what is amiss with our young chief, and then we may believe thy prophecies,” said Carbre, petulantly, and bringing his horse nearer to Feilim. “Were his father dead a messenger would have conveyed the news, and no stranger arrived yesterday at the castle. Besides, did the Banshee scream, we, ourselves, would have heard it, for, are we not all of one blood?”

“When the great Nial died,” answered Feilim, “no Banshee was heard by his sons in Tara.”

“No, because he did not die there, he was slain in Gaul.”

“A truce to your dark hints and innuendoes, Feilim,” said Ibar, impatiently, “Carbre may be right. With the exception of her foster-sister, the princess Sybilla, Una is the brightest pearl in Emania, and it may be that the young chief Congal looks not with favoring eye on the gallant that would dare to approach her. I have marked of late, that they have not conversed so much together as was their wont.”

“If that be so it will breed discontent in Emania,” remarked Feilim, “and besides ——”

“Which way is the chieftain going,” exclaimed Carbre, interrupting Feilim, utterly careless of the prophecy he was



about to utter; "see, he has taken the path that leads to the dark glen; and if we cannot reach it before night, may Belus preserve us, for it is a dreadful place."

"It is the abode of spirits and demons, where the eye of Bel never penetrates," answered Feilim, cautiously, and in a whisper.

"In his present mood, methinks, he cares neither for spirits nor demons," said Ibar, "and with such a stout henchman as Carbre beside him, to speak nothing of our own prowess, he need not fear any encounter."

"He is gaining the wood and will soon be in its shadows; so let us follow wherever he may lead," replied Carbre, urging his horse forward.

They quickly followed and overtook Mahon, who, still absorbed in reverie, was taking no note of the way he was pursuing. A narrow path led into a dark wood whose huge and tall trees seemed, by their size and strength, to have taken root in the soil many centuries before. The sun was declining in the heavens, and his last faint beams tipping the mountain tops with gold, as they entered the sombre precincts of the forest. The first intimation of the flight of time, which the young chieftain received, was the sudden shadows thrown athwart his path as he passed the opening in the woods and came underneath the trees. Recalling his scattered senses, and banishing for the moment the thought of Sybilla from his heart, he gazed around in doubt, deeming that he had lost his way; but seeing his retainers following close behind, felt convinced that he was pursuing the right direction toward his home; and without any misgivings went on his course.

Very different, however, were the thoughts of his companions. Wondering at the cause which impelled him to tread such an unfrequented and dreary way, they followed in silence; and as the shades of evening fell, and the twilight came, hushing the song of the birds, and casting a weird and dreary stillness over the surrounding woods, they felt a dread steal over their spirits, a depressing and dejected, feeling which, in spite of all their efforts, they could not conquer or subdue. Sometimes a deer would leap from out the thickets,

and dart across their path, causing their horses to plunge with restive and uneasy motions.

Soon the howl of the hungry wolf disturbed the silence of the solitude, and the night bats, as they flitted about their ears, caused by their reckless and rude familiarity a superstitious thrill in their hearts. The moon had risen, but so thick and dense was the leafy foliage of the forest that her beams were but imperceptibly perceived and at brief intervals. They were journeying far from the haunts of men, and every step led them into a more impenetrable darkness. Carbre and his companions were lost in a maze of doubt, perplexity and superstition, and were on the point of questioning the young Prince in regard to his destination, when his voice, at a distance, was heard calling on them. Gladly they obeyed, and coming to his side found themselves on the bank of a small stream that wandered through the woods.

"Where are we, Carbre?" demanded Mahon, as his follower approached. "Methinks we should be in Tir-Owen ere this; but this place is not familiar to my eye; I have never trodden it before."

"I have followed you, my chief," replied Carbre, "but know not where you have led me."

For the first time, the thought flashed on Mahon that he had led his followers astray, and in trying to secure safety from Milcho and the angry Druids within the domains of his own territory, had, by his negligence and abstraction, brought them to the very abode of some Druid of Dalaradia.

From this dilemma he knew not how to extricate himself without consulting his companions, and, after a pause, again addressed Carbre:

"Don't think, Carbre, that by crossing this stream we would be in the territory of our kinsfolk, in Tir-owen?"

"I know not, my chief, but I believe this brook runs from Lough Neagh, and here divides the two principalities."

Ibar and Feilim were of the same opinion, and as both were eager to leave the gloomy woods behind, proposed that they should cross the stream and camp for the night, in the moonlight, on the opposite bank, and await the dawn of morning

to resume their journey. This being assented to, they led their horses to the shore, in search for a shallow and fordable place to cross.

It was some time before they could obtain a desirable point; for the river, though not deep, was obstructed by rocks and driftwood, and the current, in some places, impetuous and violent. Having at length obtained what they sought, they urged their horses into the water, and were midway in the current, without meeting with any accident, when a tree, which had been uprooted by the violence of a recent storm, came drifting down the river, and coming in collision with Carbre's horse, which was in advance of the others, crushed the noble animal and unseated his rider.

Carbre, with the exception of a few slight bruises, was, however, unhurt; but the horse, with an expiring shriek, which echoed fearfully on the stillness of the night, disappeared in the darkness, while his master, grasping the stirrups of Mahon, swam ashore in safety.

Scarcely had they landed, when a light was seen gleaming from a rock that rose high above the river's bank; and looking up, they beheld an old and venerable man, with a pine torch blazing in his hand; and by its light trying to penetrate the darkness below. His beard, long and white, waved in the night-wind, and when for a moment, at rest, reached to his knees. His dress was not distinguishable, for the inconstant flickering of the torch, sometimes fanned by the wind into a blaze and at other times nearly extinguishing it, rendered it impossible to judge by his costume who he was.

"By the light of Bell!" exclaimed Mahon, shading his eyes with his hands, and peering through the darkness at the object before him, "but I believe he is a Druid, and we are trespassing on his holy ground. This river may be sacred to some deity, and yonder groves be the abiding places of holy priests and vestals."

"If so," replied Carbre, hurriedly, "we had better use no laggard pace in leaving them behind."

"I knew there was some evil over us," said Feilin, in whining tones, all his superstitious fears gaining the ascendant; "did I not tell thee so, Ibar? Let us begone."

"Hush! thy fears have bewildered thee. How can we leave in such darkness as this, not knowing which path to pursue? Let us remain and see what morning will bring forth! The water has stiffened my joints, and I feel a pain in the old wound the boar gave me."

"Hadst thou taken my advice, Ibar, the boar would not have wounded thee; but it seems that I am ever disregarded."

"The light is coming hither!" exclaimed Mahon, "he sees us and is descending the cliff. Let us wait and meet him."

Gradually the torch drew near, and its light shone full upon the dress and face of him who bore it. A light and benignant expression lit up his countenance; and his eyes glowed with love and benevolence. That he was not a Druid or bard was apparent by his mantle, which was coarse and of the kind commonly worn by slaves. But that he was none of the latter was readily discernable by his lofty manner and noble mien, despite his poor and ragged dress.

As he approached the group, who stood silent and wondering at his unexpected appearance in such a place, and at such an hour, he saluted them with courtly grace, and anxiously inquired if he could do them any service, but with such humility and tenderness of tone as to win their hearts and banish even the fears of Feilim, who for once, during the day, ceased to prognosticate evil.

"We are belated travelers, gentle sir," answered Mahon, respectfully saluting him, "and have lost our way. We left King Milcho's castle this evening, intending to sojourn in Tir-owen, but by some mishap took the wrong direction and scarce know where we are."

"You have journeyed far out of your way," replied the old man, "and you are still in the woods of Dalaradia. It is impossible to proceed further to-night, but if you deign to partake of the scant hospitality which my humble hut can afford, I will freely give it, in the name of that God who so freely provides for all. I was at my devotions ere retiring for the night, when I heard a shriek coming up the valley; and praised be our God! it led me to find you. I knew not what it was until I perceived the

poor creature struggling in the water. It is a treacherous current and difficult to pass."

"The gods were propitious, then, for we crossed it in safety."

A sigh escaped the old man as Mahon spoke, and as he gazed on the manly and stalwart forms of him and his companions, a scarcely perceptible shade of melancholy clouded his brow.

"My hut lies behind yonder cliff," he continued, "and is well sheltered from the storms and the wind. We can reach it by a by-path, up which you can lead your horses, and gain its shelter in a few brief moments."

"We shall avail ourselves of your hospitality, kind sir," replied Mahon, "and also reward your generosity for your trouble."

"I seek no reward in this world for any act of charity I may do. Mine I hope will be found in a brighter and a better sphere."

"As you will, then, so be it," answered Mahon, catching the bridle rein of his horse and preparing to depart. "Lead on, for I confess I am weary and would fain rest my limbs until the day-god again lights up the valleys and the hills."

The old man made no answer, but walking before them, led them by a different path than that by which he had descended; and ere they were aware of the close proximity of the cliff, were beside it, and at its base saw a light burning in a small cabin, almost wholly concealed and shaded by rocks and trees.

## CHAPTER IX.

### ST. PALLADIUS' DISCIPLE.

Far in a wild, unknown to public view,  
From youth to age a reverend hermit grew ;  
The moss his bed, the cave his humble cell,  
His food the fruits, his drink the crystal well ;  
Remote from men, with God he passed his days ;  
Prayer all his business, all his pleasure praise.

—*Parnell.*

“That is my hut, where you see the light burning,” observed their guide, as he slowly pointed the way down the steep declivity that led to the cabin ; “Follow me, and be not afraid, Owen is waiting for us and will give us kindly greeting.”

In silence they pursued the path down from the cliff, and as they reached its base, before them stood the abode of him who had guided them thither. The door was open, and as they came within sight a kind and friendly voice bade them welcome. They entered. Before them appeared the tall form of a man of gigantic stature, in the full flush and prime of life. His broad and massive shoulders, the extraordinary length of his arms, and the huge girth of his body, which was loosely wrapped in a saffron-colored shirt, he having thrown off his mantle, or cloak, immediately attracted the attention of Mahon and his companions. His eyes, which were jet black and lustrous, seemed to sparkle with a more intense brilliancy than the pine torch which he held in his hand. His hair fell in wavy masses down his shoulders, and was dark and glossy as the wing of the raven. His crommel and beard were of the same hue, and gave to his features a pleasing and beautiful expression. Mahon paused on the threshold and gazed upon him in mute admiration which he did not endeavor to conceal ; while Carbre, Fcilm and Ibar, involun-

terly drew back, believing him to be some great chief, or perhaps the Ard Ríagh of Erin himself.

"Do not be afraid, my friends," observed their guide, noticing the hesitation of Mahon's followers; "Owen, though a giant in height and strength, is gentle and harmless as a child. Enter without fear, and partake of such poor hospitality as we can bestow."

Reassured by the kind words of Owen, who again bade them welcome, they entered the hut. A few rude benches were disposed around the walls, and in the centre stood a rude table, on which a book, beautifully bound in vellum, and with golden clasps, lay open. A bundle of deerskins were piled behind the door, and on the walls, hung bows, spears and other implements of the chase. The hut was scrupulously neat and clean, and to the belated and wearied travelers, offered peace, comfort and rest, after the fatigues of the day.

Disposing of their arms on the antlers which hung on the walls, and being seated, their kindly hosts brought from an adjoining apartment, two huge dishes of fish and venison, and a goodly quantity of oaten cake. Carefully removing the book, Owen spread before them the repast, while his older companion hastened to bring fresh water from a spring that bubbled close by the hut. Having returned, he desired his guests to partake freely of the scanty fare, humbly apologizing for its rude and meagre proportions; but expressing a hope that he would be able to provide them with better and daintier fare on the morrow. Mahon courteously thanked him, and he and his followers immediately set about following his instructions. Their appetites were keen, and the savory venison and fat salmon of Lough Neagh soon disappeared before the hungry and ravenous clansmen. Mahon partook sparingly. The burden of sorrow that lay on his heart, banished all other feelings from his heart; and a gloomy and settled melancholy sat upon his brow. This was observed by Conall, the host,—he who had guided them to the hut—and bringing from a recess a harp, he seated himself at the door and began to play.

The wondrous manner in which he struck the strings, and

the beauty of the air he played, fell upon the ravished senses of Mahon like a burst of heavenly melody ; and even the giant Carbre paused for a moment in his meal, to listen. At the conclusion of the air, Conall re-adjusted the strings of his harp, and without looking from the instrument or noticing its effect on his guests, began, in a sweet plaintive manner, another and a different air. At first the notes sounded low as if laden with sorrow, then gradually rising, swelled into a loud acclaim of praise and thanksgiving, ending in a rapturous outpouring of prayer and joy. Owen, as the first notes fell on his ear, bent his head on his bosom, and clasping his hands as if in supplication, bowed low toward the ground. But at the conclusion, he raised his hands and eyes toward Heaven, and his lips parted, seemingly in prayer.

Mahon's interest was awakened by Owen's attitude, and, glancing at Conall, he beheld his face glow with a bright and holy expression, which he believed could only be given to a sacred Druid and priest of Bel. While an unaccountable feeling of awe, blended with admiration, crept over him, he wished, yet hesitated to question his host on his position, his manner and mode of life. That he was something other than what he seemed, he readily surmised and implicitly believed. All the meekness and humility assumed in his present character, could not hide or disguise the nobility and high born grace so apparent in his carriage and demeanor. The impressive and earnest manner, in which he executed the last air on the harp, and so wholly had he thrown his soul into the invocation, which he believed he was making to his God, tended to confirm Mahon's suspicions that he was some noble Druid ; and as he concluded he could no longer curb his desire of questioning him :

"Methinks, good Conall, thy melody, to judge by its sweetness and purity, is more suited for the court of the Ard Riagh than for this lone hut in the forest. Right deftly you touch the strings, and never before have I heard such witching strains. Was not that last strain of your harp an invocation to the day-god, and one you first learned in the sacred groves?"

"I am but a poor mimicker of my masters in the art of



music," meekly replied Conall, "and but ill-fitted for courtly or kingly company. The hymn thou hast heard, has never yet resounded in the groves of the Druids; but the time is at hand when it will be heard in grove, and camp, and countless thousands, redeemed and purified, shall echo it from end to end of our Island. It was an invocation to God. Not to Bel the god of the Druids, but to the only true and living God, to whom be all praise and glory!"

Mahon and his companions half started from their seats and gazed with blank astonishment at Conall and Owen. The latter, however, were calm and self-possessed, and appeared not to mark the change which so suddenly took possession of their guests. A momentary silence ensued, and during the interval a host of strange thoughts and fancies flitted through the brain of Mahon. He was more puzzled than before and at a loss to unravel the web of mystery which enshrouded the two singular beings before him. To the last surmise which his imagination conjured, up he gave expression, looking Conall intently in the face:

"Your words then, Conall, lead me to believe that your faith is different from ours, which is and has been, militant in the land for centuries; and that you belong to a remnant of that tribe which still exists in Erin, and whose dwellings are the mountains and forests—the Tuatha-de-Danaans."\*

"No. Did the sons of Milesius ever forsake *their* God to join in the mummeries and superstitions of a people they despised? Though, truth to say, they are all God's children; and the light will shine for them as well as for us. But I belong not to their tribe, and believe not in their creed."

"There are no other creeds in Erin. The idols of the Tuatha-de-Danaans are crumbling before the glorious light of the Sun-god, and are hid deep in mountain caves or in the recesses of the forests. Belus is our god, and we know none but him."

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\*The Tuatha-de-Danaans were a tribe whose original seat has given rise to much controversy. Some suppose them to have been Phœnecians, but it is much more probable they were Iberian Celts, who came to Ireland from the mining regions of the Pyrenees.—*Luffy's Hibernian Magazine*, Vol. 5.

"Yes, there is another; one before whom Belus shall pale, for he is the work of His hands; before whom your idols shall melt like wax in the fire; and your kings shall bow down and worship, deeming themselves but worms before the majesty of His power and glory. He is the God I worship, the King whom I adore! His light is already on the land and who can hide its beams?"

"Who, then, in the name of holy Bel, is this God of yours?" passionately exclaimed Mahon, his impetuous nature getting the better of his judgment and courtesy, and fiercely stamping on the earthen floor: "What is His name? He must be mighty and unbounded in power to overthrow the gods and worship of Erinn."

"He is infinite in power and in all things; He is the Creator of heaven and earth; the sun, the moon, the stars and the sea, and all things that appear plain and palpable to our senses are the work of His hands. He is the Redeemer and the judge of men, and suffered for us an ignominious death on the tree. He is the Christ—the Crucified—the God of the Christians, and I am an humble and unworthy follower of the cross. Look upon this sign; the emblem of Salvation, whose light shall soon illumine the land and shatter the false idols of Bel."

Drawing a crucifix from his bosom he devoutly kissed it and held it up before them. Had a venomous and deadly serpent at that moment fiercely coiled its loathsome body around Mahon and his followers, and driven its fangs into their hearts, they could not have felt a more poignant feeling of dread and horror, than took possession of them at the sight of the cross. They leaped from the table, and glared with protruding eyes and distended nostrils at the Christian, who had so fearlessly confessed his hated faith; and would have rushed from the hut were it not that Conall stood between them and the door, and they feared to touch him, lest the talisman in his hand should work some evil spell upon them. The anguish of Feilim was pitiable. His belief in spells and sorcery was always great, and now, he firmly believed that his forbodings of the day were realized. Cold drops of perspiration stood

on his brow; his legs trembled beneath him, and with a groan he fell backward on the floor. Carbre and Ibar, though imbued with the prevailing ideas of the time, were not sunk so deep in the mire of superstition as their comrade; and recovered their scattered senses when they saw their young chief, standing unharmed and fearless, before the Christian. Springing to the wall, Carbre hastily snatched his spear and leaped to Mahon's side, exclaiming,

"Fear nothing, my Prince; the idol of a Christian dog cannot prevail against the followers of the Sun-god. Let us depart. The wolves of the wood, though wild and savage, are better company than these unbelievers."

"Nay, rather let us take them with us to Tir-Owen, bound and fettered, where our Prince himself, can mete out judgment to them for their blasphemies," cried Ibar, who had now joined them with his spear and shield.

"Be still, my friends," said Conall in a calm and unfaltering tone, without the least hesitation or fear: "We do not seek to injure you. The woods are damp, and my poor hut, humble though it be, affords a pleasanter shelter. Surely, four armed soldiers of Erinn are not afraid of two defenceless men!"

Mahon stood irresolute; his first impulse was to fly, but there was something so commanding and fascinating withal, in the manner and countenance of Conall, that riveted his attention and chained him to the spot. His surprise and astonishment over, his curiosity became excited to know more of the singular being with whom he had so unexpectedly been thrown in contact; and he determined to remain for the night, and, if possible, extract from him his history. Telling his followers to remain quiet, he again resumed his seat, and Feiliin, who had by this time recovered from his fright, took his place beside them.

"It pains me, Conall," Mahon began, "to think that we have caused you needless trouble; but I confess that I have heard so many fearful stories concerning these Christians, that I am not surprised at the consternation exhibited by my followers, when brought in contact with one. My curiosity is great to

know, what motives prompted you to forsake the faith of your fathers, and adopt the creed of this strange god, whose name is unknown in Erinn. It would please me well to hear the story."

"The tale is brief, Prince Mahon,—for such I believe is your title,—and one which I shall willingly relate if you find it not tedious. You may remember to have heard of a strange missionary who came across the seas to convert the children of Erinn. His name was Palladius.\* He was not successful. Paganism had taken such deep root in the land, that the ambassador of God was stoned and forced to fly as an outlaw; pursued with vengeance by the people whom he came to save. I dwelt then, on the shores of the Foyle, and in my house the persecuted and hunted man sought shelter. He found it, and repaid me back a thousand fold for the hospitality I had shown him, by imparting to me the faith of his divine master. Being of a religious disposition, I had long entertained the idea of entering the Druidical priesthood, and was being educated for that high office by one of their most learned scholars. Seeing me poring over my books, the stranger in my house inquired the nature of my studies. I opened to him my heart, and unfolded to him my hopes and aspirations. He read my books, and, one by one, by his subtle reasoning and eloquence, persuaded me of the fallacy of their arguments. Slowly, and by degrees, a new light seemed to dawn upon me; new ideas took possession of my soul; I began to doubt the efficacy of Bel and his idols, and panted to know more of the god of whom he had as yet but seldom spoken. Finding my mind prepared for the goodly seed which he was about to sow, he made known to me the mysteries of the holy faith which he professed, and of which he was a worthy follower. It pleased God to bestow on me the light of faith; and before the good Saint left for Britain, he baptized and made me a soldier of Christ. He prophesied that one greater than himself should come to Erinn, and to him should be given the power to rescue the land from idolatry. While he remained with me, I trans-

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\* St. Palladius. His mission to Ireland was unsuccessful, but he nevertheless baptized some converts, and erected a few churches.

scribed the gospels from a copy in his possession ; and that is the book you have seen with the golden clasps. It tells of Christ's passion ; of His sufferings for us ; and how He died for the salvation of sinners. As the night is but young I shall feel happy in reading to you the words of our divine Saviour."

Mahon and his companions were becoming deeply interested in the Christian's story. All fear and dread had passed away before the kindness of his voice and manner. A bright look of enthusiasm kindled on the face of Owen, as he heard the young Prince express a desire to hear the gospel ; and a sanguine hope, of their speedy conversion, entered his heart.

Conall extracted from the gospels such passages as he thought would make a favorable impression on his hearers ; and rehearsed to them the mission of John, and how he had foretold the coming of the man-God. Then, in a sweet, impassioned voice, he read the sermon on the Mount ; Christ's passion, His agony in the garden, and His cruel crucifixion and death. So absorbed were they in the narration, and so heart-felt in their sympathy with the Saviour's sufferings, that the tears welled from their generous hearts, and moistened their eyes. More than an hour was consumed in the exercise, and Conall, perceiving the effect of his teaching, closed the volume for the night, in order that, by his discourse, he might more firmly fix the truths, they had heard, upon their hearts.

"This is the God," he continued, "whom Palladius taught me to love and adore. After his departure I left all my worldly goods behind, and in company with Owen, who also became a convert to the faith, sought this secluded spot, to await the coming of him who shall vanquish the idols of Erin. Already his footsteps are heard in the land ; wherever he appears the false idols of the gods crumble before him, and Truth and Faith, as taught by the blessed Patrick, triumph over idolatry and sin."

"And who is this, Patrick ?" eagerly enquired Mahon, the scene in Milcho's banquet-hall rising like a vision before him.

"He is one who was a former slave of the king of Dalarnia, known by the name of Sicur, and of whom your Druids

have foretold great things. They have said that "with Laegari, the violent, will the land be humbled by the coming of Patrick; that he will root out Druidism from the land; that he will erect cities, churches, union-houses, with gables and angles, and many kings will take up pilgrim staffs."

"A Tailcenn will come over the raging sea,  
With his perforated garment, his crook-headed staff,  
With his table at the east end of his house,  
And all his people will answer amen, amen."

That time is come. Patrick has arrived. The great idol of Crom-cruach,\* with its twelve golden satellites, to whom were offered the firstlings of the flocks and other rich gifts, is overthrown; and bearing the standard of the cross, he hies him northward, to confront Milcho and his Druids in Dalaradia; to shatter their gods, and to give to the people the glad tidings of salvation. Even now, he is approaching. Perhaps, to-morrow's sun will see the cross gleam on the mountains of Emania. O! Prince Mahon, weigh well the words thou hast heard to-night, and hasten to embrace the truth which Patrick shall impart to thee. I am but an unworthy servant of the Most High; but to him, as I have said, is given the power to carry out the behests of God, and redeem this fair land from idolatry and sin. Tarry with me for a while, and when the great missionary of Christ approaches, we shall go forth to meet him, and judge with our own eyes what power the Lord has given unto him. I have dispatched a messenger to Lagenia† who will soon return and warn me of his coming. Together we shall meet him, and bear him company to Dalara-dia."

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\* *The Idol of Crom Cruach.*—The name signifies the bent or stooping monument. It was the principal idol of all the colonists who settled in Ireland from time to time, and they were wont to offer to it the firstlings of animals and other gifts. It is called the *Cen Cruach* in the Tripartite life of St. Patrick, and there, it is said, that it was made of gold and silver, and that it was surrounded by twelve other idols formed of bronze.—*Nun of Kenmare.*

† Leinster

The last clause of Conall's argument was more effective in gaining the consent of Mahon to prolong his visit, than any he had yet used; for, though he had but recently left Dalara-dia, and was fleeing from the vengeance which he believed was in store for him there, he had left his heart behind with Sybilla, and was glad of any plausible excuse to return, and, if possible, once more behold her. Besides, the ideas of the new faith, inculcated by Conall, sunk deep in his mind, and he wished to test the sincerity and truth of his expressions by witnessing himself the great missionary whom the Druids so much dreaded, and at whose name the stern warrior, Milcho, trembled. It was, therefore, with no disguised feelings of dissimulation or hypocrisy that he answered:—

“I shall tarry with you, Conall, until your great prophet approaches, if I do not intrude too much on your kindness and hospitality; and be assured, I shall ponder on the words you have spoken, and con them in my mind as I lie on my couch to-night.”

“My poor hut is open to the Prince of Tir-owen as long as he deigns to honor it with his presence; and as for hospitality, the woods and waters supply us with enough, and more than abundance. Sorry am I that I cannot serve you as I wish, and minister more generously to your wants. But, such as it is, you are welcome to it in the name of Him who so bountifully supplied it.”

“My heart, good Conall, is filled with thoughts to which it has before been a stranger; and I am wearied with the day's hard ride, and would fain lay me down to seek repose.”

“We shall make a couch for you and your retainers as soon as we sing our evening hymn, and pray that the light of truth may be vouchsafed to you, and that you may rise on the morrow with the love of the true God shining in your souls.”

Making the sign of the cross on his forehead, he took the harp, and kneeling with Owen, sang a hymn of praise to God and his Virgin Mother. Then, devoutly repeating the Lord's Prayer and the Angelical Salutation, they arose, and prepared their couches for the night. Deer and wolf skins were spread on the floor, and underneath, a quantity of dried moss, which,

to the weary travellers, made not only a welcome but a luxurious bed. As each retired for the night, many and deep were the thoughts that agitated their bosoms and banished slumber from their eyelids. And little did they deem, that events were about to occur, that would, not only change the whole current of their lives, but would forever leave their impress upon Ireland, and perhaps the world.



## CHAPTER X.

## A DAY IN THE FOREST.

'Tis merry, 'tis merry in the good green wood,  
 When the mavis and merle are singing.  
 —*Scott.*

Anxious, restless and uneasy, with a thousand conflicting thoughts flitting through his brain, Mahon lay on his couch. His heart was ill at ease. The events of the last three days, so unexpected and singular in their developments, and so freighted with good or evil for him, passed before him in review; and no matter how favorably he endeavored to analyze them, he could not extract one ray of comfort from the deep and tangled maze in which he found himself lost. As his thoughts recurred to his meeting with Sybilla in the grove, and the dread denunciation of the Druid—who charged him with being a Christian, and which accusation was the cause of all his troubles—he felt his heart swell with indignation, at the perfidy of Conra; and vowed to himself to return in the morning and confront him with the lie. But remembering how abruptly he had left, and that Conra, ere this, had imparted to Milcho, with many exaggerations, the scene in the grove, and that even now the clansmen of Dalaradia might be on his track, his sense of danger warned him to remain, or else continue his course towards home.

Again, the words of Conall had made a deep impression on his heart and filled him with strange thoughts of the power and greatness of the wonderful God whom he worshiped. He wished to hear more concerning him; and the words of the Holy Book, so prized by Conall, had a wonderful fascination for him. This Sicur, or Patrick, the great apostle of the new creed, before whose name Milcho trembled, and whom the

Druids feared, had already come to fulfil the prophecies concerning him, and break the idols of Bel. He would soon be in Dalaradia, and then it would be seen, whether he had power, or not, over the Druids and their gods. How strange it was that he, Mahon, who had scarcely ever heard of the Christian creed, should be branded as one, and stigmatized as a traitor to the ancient faith of his fathers. This calumny had cost him the brightest pearl his heart prized, Sybilla, and drove him from her with the brand of infamy upon his brow. And fate or misfortune led him whither? To the last place on earth he would wish to enter—the house of a Christian. The more he revolved the matter in his mind, the more perplexing he found it. Grown wearied with the gloomy thoughts which haunted him, and jaded by the long and fatiguing journey of the day, he at length succumbed to sleep, and did not awake until the sun was up and the birds singing on the trees.

A savory odor of venison was diffused around the hut, and Owen, as he entered the apartment, invited him to breakfast. Conall, Carbre, Ibar and Feilim, were awaiting him, and as soon as he entered, all sat down to the morning repast.

The meal being finished, Conall reminded his guest of his promise of the preceding night, to remain with him until the arrival of Patrick in Emania, which could not be far distant; and proposed, as the day promised to be fine, to go on a fishing excursion to Lough Neagh. A walk through the woods in the morning would be delightful, and they might have an opportunity of displaying their skill with the bow on a deer or wolf. The offer was readily accepted by the company; and after making preparations for the day's sport, they left the hut and entered the forest. The beauty of the day, the mild breathings of Summer, and the carol of innumerable birds that flitted from tree to tree in joyous happiness and untrammelled freedom, lent a charm to the scene, which helped to banish from Mahon's heart the gloom and melancholy which oppressed it. Conall, too, by his cheerful manner and sprightly tone, contributed materially to that end; and before they reached the bank of the lake, Mahon felt in a more buoyant mood than he had known for days.

Lough Neagh abounded with fish, as did the forests with game; they were free to all who chose to follow them, and few there were in ancient Erinn, who could not deftly handle the spear and bow. The chase was the pastime of king and peasant at the period of which we write. In peace they followed it, because it resembled war more than any other pastime; and its fatigues and trials prepared them to withstand the stern shock and danger of battle. During the intervals of peace, they considered it royal sport to hunt the wild boar, the wolf and deer; and courted its dangers, "waiting for nobler game to come." But the forests are gone; an embargo is on the lakes, the glory of Erinn is departed, and the cold tongue of the stranger is heard on the plains, where once the Gael ruled in love and freedom.

Two small boats were hastily launched, and with their long spears in readiness, they put out into the lake. So exciting was the sport, and so numerous the finny victims, that the hours stole away, unheeded by Mahon, until reminded by Conall that the sun had gained its meridian splendor.

"Then let us to the shore," returned Mahon, "and cook our noon-day meal. This sport has given me an appetite, which I would fain appease, before I try my luck on wolf or deer in the forest."

They returned, and were soon joined by the others, who began preparations for their meal.

"Hist!" said Mahon, whose watchful eye had been scanning the bank, and who suddenly observed a deer in an opening of the forest with head erect and sniffling the air. "Give me your bow, Ibar; a slice of that fat buck will be no bad acquisition to our meal if I can bring him down."

Ibar silently handed him the bow, and carefully fixing an arrow to the string, the fatal shaft sped with lightning rapidity and lodged deep in the heart of the deer. He sprang into the air, and fell writhing in his blood. Ibar and Carbre immediately proceeded to skin and dress him with their hunting knives, while Owen and Feilim were busy with the salmon. While thus engaged, Mahon seated himself on the bank beside Conall, and listened to the Gospel which the latter had brought.

with him for the purpose. An hour was consumed in this holy exercise; and when they seated themselves on the grass to partake of the savory meal prepared for them, the subject of Christianity and the coming of the apostle Patrick, was renewed. Owen had not been altogether absorbed in the business of catching fish during the hours of the morning. He had been reciting to his companions, the manner of his conversion, and the high hopes he entertained of the redemption of Erinn, on the coming of Patrick. Thus were their minds gradually opened and prepared for the words of Conall. They listened to him with respect and awe, and gravely hearkened to the great truths he taught them. They propounded many questions which he eagerly answered, and strove in his own gentle, but eloquent and forcible way, to instil into their hearts the love of the true God which was burning in his own. As yet he could not tell if the seed had taken root; but trusting in the mercy of the Saviour, he hoped and prayed.

Conall again renewed the conversation, when returning in the evening, laden with the spoils of lake and wood; and before retiring for the night, joined with Owen in prayer for the speedy conversion of the Island from the thralldom of idolatry, and for the salvation of the guests beneath their roof. If Mahon and his friends did not participate in the prayer, it seemed to move them, for they remained silent for the rest of the night.

Two days passed away. On the third morning, Mahon requested Conall to accompany him through the forest, and bring with him his book. Having arrived at a secluded spot about a mile distant from the hut, they seated themselves on the trunk of a huge oak that had been uprooted by the storm. Mahon requested him to read that part of the holy book which told of the sufferings of Him they had crucified. Readily he complied, and in a feeling and tremulous voice, read for him the passion of the Saviour. He listened in silence, and Conall, at the conclusion, looking up, found him bathed in tears.

A holy joy took possession of the Christian's soul to find him thus, and throwing his arms around him, he hung on his neck

and wept like a child. Their tears mingled together, and with a sudden impulse, both knelt on the sod and returned thanks to God. It was a holy and happy hour, and one long remembered by both with praise and love.

Their emotion having subsided, Mahon opened his heart to his friend, disclosing to him its innermost secrets. He recounted his love for the vestal, Sybilla, and all the incidents connected therewith; of the scene in the banquet hall, and the reasons which compelled him so abruptly to abandon the court of Milcho.

Conall listened to his hopes and fears, and then in a tone soothing as that of the mother to the babe, told him to be of good cheer; that a noble princess, like Sybilla, would never become the vestal of a false god; but would spurn his base idols from her, and listen to the word of truth, and believe, when the Apostle Patrick scattered their creed to the winds, and confounded the Druids, who had cast their unhallowed spells over her.

"We shall journey to meet him," he continued, enthusiastically, "and march with him to Dalaradia. We shall assist in the conversion of those who seek your life, and humble and conquer them with the word of God. The Druids, themselves, have foretold their own downfall. Though backed up by the kings and chiefs of the land, they tremble in their strongholds, as well they may; for the conqueror is at hand. Fear not, Mahon, for the Princess Sybilla; for, though she were hid in the innermost recesses of the sacred groves, and guarded by dragons, yet shall we find a way to enter and save her from the toils."

These bold words gave courage and hope to the young chieftain's heart, and created a more intense longing for the hour to come, when he would behold the bright star that was to dispel the mist of superstition, and give light and freedom to Erinn.

"It was no common accident that directed your steps to my hut," continued Conall, "on the night of our first meeting. I had dispatched Bratha, a friend of mine, to Lagenia, to bring tidings of Patrick; and, after seeing him safely across the river,

was returning to my hut, when I heard your follower's horse's cry of agony, and went to your assistance. The hand of God guided your footsteps that night, and led you to light and victory. Humble as I am, and unworthy, it pleased Him to make me the instrument of His desire. When such glorious fruit is garnered by the meanest of His followers, what may we not expect when His chosen one shall come."

"The Druids are all powerful over the Ard Riagh, and like the bards, are wedded to their idols," returned Mahon. "They are learned in tongues, and skilled in reasoning; are beloved by the people, and obeyed by them in all matters concerning religion, and it will be a hard task, methinks, to part with an old friend for a stranger."

"Do you find it so, Mahon?"

"I know not. I am agitated with conflicting feelings, and opposing thoughts are tugging at my heart."

"You are fighting the battle against the evil one. In my novitiate, I wrestled with his promptings, and almost fell. But Palladius aided me with his prayers. We prayed to the Saviour and His Virgin Mother, and in the end we triumphed. Pray, and you shall do likewise."

"Have you not taught me, Conall, that your God is a God of love, and that He will assist those who make intercession to Him?"

"Yes, it is written so in the Book of Truth."

"Then He will aid me to overcome the promptings of the evil one."

"Yes. When Owen and I knelt to-night in prayer, prostrate yourself in spirit before the Most High, and humbly crave His blessing and His love. Our prayers shall ascend with your's, and it may please Him to hearken to our appeal."

"I shall follow your instructions, for your words have sunk into my heart, and I would fain believe."

"Oh, Mahon, you shall be blessed with the faith. Before you lies a bright and happy future. Think not of the power or influence of the bards and Druids; they shall fall from their lofty state, and their pride shall be turned to shame. Their idols shall become a mockery, and the plough-share furrow

their sacred groves. They shall be unknown in the land, and, in their place, shall rise temples to the living God, bearing on their front the emblem of man's salvation. A thousand bells shall join their harmony in celebrating the jubilee of peace; and around the holy altars a thousand censurs shall burn, while the white-robed priests offer up the sacred blood, in atonement and expiation of our sins. And you shall have a part in the great work. As Prince of Tir-Owen, and chief of a thousand followers, your influence within your own territory, will be greater than any Druid's. When the white wand of your tribe is placed in your hand, on the Rath of Tullough Oge, I trust it will be grasped by the hand of a Christian; and that she who will share your glory, though now a pagan, will be then as firm and as steadfast in Christian fortitude, as were Mary and Martha."

"You are sanguine in your expectations, and enthusiastic in your prophecies, good Conall; but you may not see them all realized."

"Something tells me I shall. But if I do not, they shall, nevertheless, come to pass."

"Well, in a little while we shall know all," replied Mahon, sorrowfully, as his thoughts reverted to Sybilla.

"Yes," answered Conall, with a smile, "the power of the Druids, and their boasted idols will soon be put to the test. It will be an unequal battle, however, for who can prevail against the living God? None."

Mahon lapsed into silence, but his thoughts were busy. A bright hope burned within him, and a strange courage animated his heart. As they returned to the hut he fancied the trees were fringed with a greener verdure, the flowers wafted a more odorous perfume, and the birds sang sweeter, than on the preceding morning. The forest was, indeed, glorious. Clothed in a mantle of green, the huge and gnarled oaks raised their tall heads to the sky, and extended their spreading wings as if to woo the traveller to their friendly shade. And often, from the shadow of their deep boughs, a startled fawn would skip, and crossing their path, plunge into the unbroken fastnesses of the forest, while the coo of the dove was softly heard

mingling with the song of the thrush; or the more tender strains of the skylark, as she soared aloft, and poured her morning orison to heaven. Beneath their feet, the soft and yielding moss, bespangled with flowers of a thousand dyes, spread before them in nature's fairest embroidery, as pleasing and delightful to the eye, as luxurious to the foot. High up the bodies of the tallest oaks, the honeysuckle and ivy crept, and interlaced their tendrils among the branches, clinging in fondness to their great protectors. Around the one, the wanton bee hovered, kissing the honey from its dewy leaves; and from the other the chirp of the wren—the young brood—could be heard, as they stretched forth their diminutive necks over the tiny battlements of their lofty fortress, to enjoy the bright sunshine, and bask in its warm beams. The hum of the distant river added its joyous sound to the melody of the woods, as it dashed in fearless freedom over the puny barriers that opposed its way, and laughingly sped on to meet the sea. Nature seemed in her brightest mood, and the charm was imparted to the heart of Mahon. The spot reminded him of the banks of the Braid, and with a sigh, he inwardly wished that *she* was there to share with him the glory of the scene.

They had journeyed about half way to the hut, and had stopped to gather some beautiful flowers which grew in their path, when their attention was arrested by the crackling of branches, and the voice of some one approaching. They paused to listen, and as the sounds came nearer, recognized the voice of Owen. Breathless and panting, he rushed toward them, his face perspiring and florid with the exertion he had undergone.

For a moment the heart Conall sank within him, for he feared that the soldiers of Milcho had discovered the hiding-place of Mahon, and had come to wrest him to judgment and death. He trembled, and, in a faltering voice, asked Owen what tidings had he to convey.

"Good tidings!" answered Owen, as soon as he recovered sufficient breath to speak. "Bratha has returned from Lagenia, and Patrick, the Apostle, is in Dalaradia!"



"Now, God be praised!" exclaimed Conall, falling on his knees and raising his hands to heaven.

"The people are flocking in thousands to hear him," continued Owen, "The sick, the lame, the blind, are made whole by a touch of his hand; and, wherever he goes, kings, chiefs, and clansmen fall down before the Cross. The great idol of Crom-cruah is shattered by his staff; and the Druids are flying from their groves and temples, and hiding themselves in the mountains."

"Is not the prophecy being fulfilled, Mahon?" exclaimed Conall in a burst of uncontrollable joy. "It is! it is! The time is come, and the beloved of the Lord is among us. And has Bratha seen, with his own eyes, the saviour and liberator of Erin?"

"He has not only seen and conversed with him, but received his blessing. He brings to you a token from the Saint."

"O! what a blessed hour is this! How my heart yearns to gaze upon his face. But tell me, Owen, where does he tarry now?"

"At the head waters of the Braid, where he awaits your coming. Bratha shall tell you all when you reach the hut."

"Then let us hasten thither. Come Mahon, our deliverance is nigh. To-night we shall raise the song of joy, and to-morrow stand side by side with the great soldier of Christ."

Grasping Mahon by the arm, he hurried him along in the direction of the hut, which soon appeared to view, with Bratha standing on the threshold.

## CHAPTER XL.

## THE MEETING WITH ST. PATRICK.

"Then round him thronged his fierce wolf-dogs,  
 Bran, Luath, Buscor, Ban;  
 And loud he laughed and cheered them on  
 That hoary reverend man.

But soon the king his aspect changed  
 When the Saint said, scornfullie,  
 'That death thou hast for me prepared,  
 Thou surely now shalt die.' "

—*Hayes' Book of Ballads.*

"Welcome, Bratha! welcome!" exclaimed Conall, as he rushed forward to greet him, and throw himself into his arms. "And thou hast seen the blessed Patrick, and heard the word from his own lips?"

"Aye, the saviour of Erin is at hand; the hour of our redemption is come."

"Let us enter the hut, for my heart is a-fire and drunk with the glorious tidings."

Carbre, Ibar, and Feilim, arose as Mahon entered; and Conall, turning to Bratha, and pointing to Mahon, said:—

"Bratha, this is Mahon, the young Prince of Augher. He has been sojourning with us for a few days, waiting, like ourselves, for the approach of Patrick."

Bratha made a low obeisance to the Prince, and his eye kindled with pleasure as he looked on his bright and beaming face.

Being seated, Bratha told his eager audience of his adventures since leaving the hut, and his meeting with St. Patrick. The last event occurred on the confines of Lagenia and Emania, as the Saint was about setting foot in the latter, and journeying toward Dalaradia, to visit Milcho, his old master.

But so numerous were the multitudes that flocked to his standard and believed, that he made but slow progress on the way, and was often obliged to camp in the valleys over-night, and preach to thousands, who had crowded to see him. It was not until the second evening, that Bratha was permitted the happiness of speech with the good Saint. He had elbowed his way through the dense throng until he reached the tent, and knelt before him as he appeared. Patrick, seeing him, asked him if he believed; whereupon he told him that he was already a Christian, and had been sent by Conall to bring tidings of his arrival in Erinn. The Saint was well pleased, and blessed Bratha, and gave him a cross, charging him to deliver it to Conall, and bring his master to him. He would meet him by the waters of the Braid, which were not then far distant. Pleased with the success of his mission, Bratha immediately departed homewards. Such, in substance, was the gist of his story; but of the wonderful miracles he had seen performed, he never wearied in telling. The little silver crucifix, the gift of the Saint, was looked upon by Mahon's clansmen with superstitious fear, but was regarded by the Christians with veneration and love. Conall placed it next his heart; and taking the one he had formerly worn, and which was given him by Palladius, from his neck, he gave it to Mahon. The latter, kissing it, as he had seen Conall do, placed it also in his bosom. Feilim, who had become very reticent since the night of his arrival, looked at his master with a feeling of dread and horror. That the spells of the Christians were cast around him, he no longer doubted; for the charm in his bosom was ocular demonstration of the fact. A shudder passed through his frame, as Mahon received the crucifix from the hand of Conall; but, being afraid to utter a remonstrance, wisely remained silent.

"This has been a day of gladness to me," said Conall, "and to-night we shall hold a jubilee in our hut, and pour forth our praise to God for our deliverance."

"I fear to cast a shadow on your joy, good Conall," said Bratha, sorrowfully, "but I have other and adverse news to tell."

"Concerning whom?"

"Concerning all of us, but especially the Prince of Aughter."

"What of him?" asked Conall, excitedly.

"The two Princes of Dalaradia, Congal and Cathal, with a band of their father's followers, urged on by the king and his Druids, seek his life. I saw them, to-day, pass through the valley of Gluin, as I rested on the top of Slieve-Ther. I could distinctly hear the yelping of their bloodhounds. I was told, when I reached the base of the hill, whom they sought."

"In what direction were they going?" inquired Mahon, calmly.

"The path they were pursuing led toward the Braid, and my presumption is, that they were returning from Tir-owen."

"So much the better for us," returned Conall. "Patrick will meet them on the banks of the Braid, and their cries for vengeance will be turned into sighs and lamentations."

"I fear them not," returned Mahon. "I feel within me a power that defies their vengeance, and impels me forward to confront their strength. I shall go to meet the great Apostle to-morrow; and, whether for weal or woe, shall be guided by his advice and counsel."

"Nobly said," exclaimed Conall, enthusiastically, grasping Mahon by the hand, "and, until then, let us forget that any cloud looms darkly in the sky; but bask in the sunshine and happiness of the present. As I have said, we shall hold jubilee to-night, and prepare for our journey on the early morrow."

That night the harp of Conall sounded a Te-Deum, and the borders of Lough Neagh echoed the song of praise and thanksgiving, which was wafted heavenward on the wings of the western breeze. While darkness yet spread its sable mantle over the woods, and lay like a pall upon mountain, plain, and valley, a light gleamed in Conall's hut, and its eager and anxious inmates were up and stirring. A hasty breakfast was prepared, which was scarcely touched; and ere the sun's first beams brightened the eastern hills, they were ready to depart. Their path toward the Braid, though not long, was rough and

dangerous, and was not without peril of life and limb; for the road was often precipitous, rugged, and, in some places, almost impassable. Bratha, who knew the country well, was singled out as their guide, and at sunrise the pilgrims departed. The horses were left behind, and turned loose in the woods, as it was considered safer to perform the journey over the mountains on foot; and in the event of meeting Milcho's soldiers, they could easily hide themselves amid the crags and gorges, and rocks, and passes in the mountains.

With light hearts they set out. Up rose the sun over the broad expanse of forest, and shaking the mists from his mane, touched with roseate glow, river and forest, plain and hill. Far up the beautiful valley, wherein the hut was situate—far up the valley of the west—the heavy mists gathered in silvery wreaths, and trooped away like shadows of the night that had outstayed their time. Soon the hut faded from their view, and was left far behind. The murmur of the river was lost in the distance; dark, frowning mountains rose before them, and in gloomy grandeur and solitary pride, raised their huge peaks, heavenward, clothed in nature's brightest verdure, and wooded from base to summit. Beautiful glens lay smiling in the rays of the morning sun, nestled between the hills, where, in fancied security and unfettered freedom, the wild deer gambolled and browsed. Now, following the course of a stream that wimpled drowsily through a tangled grove; now cautiously climbing the sides of a precipitous rock, which overhung a deep and darksome gorge; again plunging into the dense and pathless forest, or scaling the slopes of the numerous hills that lay in their onward path; they proceeded on their journey, without halting, until the sun gave token of the noon-day hour. Resting on the banks of a streamlet, that wound its sinuous course through the bosom of a deep grove, they prepared their eventide meal, which was most welcome and refreshing, after the toilsome and fatiguing march of the morning. Though burning with impatience to reach their destination, Bratha assured them it could not be accomplished before the following day; and, being under his guidance, were obliged to curb their impatience, and submit to the mild

restrictions which he found it necessary to impose on them. After an interval of two hours, he again permitted them to resume their journey.

Conall and Mahon had kept together since morning; the latter helping his aged friend through the most difficult and intricate obstacles which impeded their way, and the former, when occasion and the nature of the ground offered a chance for conversation, instructing and enlightening his young protegee into the dogmas and mysteries of the holy faith. Thus the day passed; and as the sun set, and the twilight shadows cast their weird forms on the lonely woods, they kindled their fires, and rested for the night. Bratha assured them, ere they retired to rest, that Slieve Mis would loom up before them in the morning light, and the waters of the Braid murmur in their ears before the sun had reached the meridian.

Next morning, with light hearts and buoyant footsteps, the pilgrims resumed their march. Their hearts were beating in unison with the songsters of the forest, and throbbing with anticipated joy. With feelings of delight they found themselves nearing their destination, encompassed by the shadows of familiar mountains. The distant peak of Slieve Mis rose proudly before them, and loomed aloft, sentinelling the pleasant valleys of Dalaradia. They looked brilliant in the sunshine, with crimson and gold, and green—the living green of the forest trees—mingled in luxuriant masses. The gorgeous range of mountains seemed to circle the earth with a glory like a rainbow, while the coming haze of autumn hung its soft illusions over them, vainly endeavoring to subdue their brilliant hues. Soon the flowing, silver-voiced Braid murmured its primæval song to their ears; and they beheld the mist-wreaths on its bosom, as its waters hurried downward to the sea. From the dreary beauty of hoary mountaintop and misty river, and picturesque landscape, arose a subtle influence which enthralled the hearts of the travellers with a remembered charm.

“We are now within a few miles of the valley of the Braid, and where the Christian missionary is encamped,” said Bratha, as the first sound of the river fell on their ears.

"Then let us hasten thither," exclaimed Conall.

As his companions shared his impatience, and all were eager to approach the spot, Bratha quickened his footsteps, and pressed on. As they proceeded, they observed people of both sexes, coming from all directions of the compass, and wending their way toward the goal to which they were, themselves, journeying. As they emerged on the road that led to the valley, vast throngs were in motion, and the plains that became visible, were filled with a dense and smiling crowd. From the grey and grizzled veteran who had served in the wars of Nial, armed with spear and shield, and the haughty chieftain who could boast of his hundreds of followers, down to the *gorsoon-bo*, or cow-boy, all were there, and eagerly pressing forward to meet the man of whom they had heard so much. Our travellers joined the living stream that was impetuously surging toward the river, and were borne onward, in its swift current, until their course was impeded by the vast concourse of human beings that surrounded a little knoll, in the heart of the valley, whereon St. Patrick stood, teaching and preaching to the people.

They seemed to hang, spell-bound, on his words, and many whose hearts were moved by his teaching and pathetic eloquence, flung themselves prostrate on the ground before him, and smote their breasts. Wishing to obtain a nearer view of the great Apostle, and come within earshot of his words, Conall and his companions, with difficulty, pushed their way through the crowd, and succeeded in obtaining a good position in front of the Saint.

But what words can paint the joy and delight of Conall and Owen? Trembling on the verge of mental rapture, and transported with a delirium of joy, they listened to the words of the Prophet of God. There he stood before them, the Appointed One, holding in his hand the cross of Christ; and fearlessly proclaiming the creed of the Saviour in the very stronghold of paganism. How they hung upon his word, and to them each breath dropped balm and hope, and comfort and love. They looked upon him as one coming from the right hand of God, whose destiny it was, to curb the licen-

tious vices of the age; to break the idols which a dark idolatry had raised in the land; and substitute the gospel light of truth where all, until now, had been darkness and bondage.

The dignity of St. Patrick, and his personal beauty, combined with his rare eloquence and fascinating expression, told favorably for him, in the minds of those who came to hear his doctrines; and, in a manner, compelled them to give him an attentive hearing. His long beard, white as the driven snow, fell over the sacred vestments which he wore. He held in one hand the Crozier or Staff of Jesus, and around him stood a dozen of his disciples, dressed in white. He was now sixty years of age, but his form was erect, and tall; the bearing fearless; and the brilliancy of his eye shone with all the undiminished fire of youth. In hushed and breathless silence the multitude listened, as the loud and sonorous voice of the saint rose high in ringing cadence, and filled the valley with its measured and musical tone. He was explaining to them the melancholy and sublime details of the passion of our Lord; and so forcible and effective were his eloquence and pathos, that many an eye became moistened, and the Saint himself could not restrain a tear. It was at this moment that Conall and his companions had succeeded in gaining a closer proximity to the Saint; and, as he unfolded the terrible agony and death of the Redeemer, his heart throbbed tumultuously, the tears swelled to his eyes and filled with love and adoration, mingled with sorrow and contrition, he drew, from his bosom, the crucifix and pressed it to his lips. Mahon, who was also moved to tenderness by the impassioned words he had heard, following the example of Conall, removed from his bosom the crucifix which had been given him and held it in his hand. They soon attracted the notice of the Saint, who was then at the conclusion of his sermon. With a sweet smile he beckoned them towards him.

Before they could obey, a loud murmur, which soon swelled into a cry, arose from the crowd. Swaying backward and forward for a moment, then as if moved by some sudden impulse, the multitude suddenly broke and fled, scattering in all directions. A few, however, remained on and around the



mound where St. Patrick stood. While the Saint and his companions were lost in conjecture, at this strange proceeding of the people, the blast of a trumpet rung in their ears, and suddenly, with quick and hasty stride, a band of armed men bounded into the valley. Their bronzed and burnished spears shone bright in the sun-light, and their bearded countenances bore a fierce and angry look. They were the soldiers of Dalaradia, led by Milcho's two sons, Cathal and Congal. Beside the latter stood a tall and savage looking Dalaradian, holding in the leash a pack of bloodhounds, whose fiery eyes and red protruding tongues, betokened their savage thirst for blood. With difficulty their keeper restrained them from leaping on the terrified followers of the Saint, who clung around him for protection on the appearance of the soldiery.

Unawed and unmoved, Patrick gazed calmly on the intruders. Singling out Congal, as their leader, he slowly descended the little mound, and fearlessly confronted him. Fixing his eye on the young Prince, who haughtily returned his glance, he, in a solemn and commanding manner, addressed him:—

“By whose authority, and in whose name, do you thus come to interrupt the service of the Most High God?”

“I come in the name of Belus, the god of Erinn, and of Milcho, my father, the King of Dalaradia, to drag you and all your idolatrous followers before him, to suffer the penalty of your crimes.”

“You will find your task a difficult one, Prince,” replied Patrick, calmly, “and one which, perhaps, Belus himself could not accomplish. Know you not, that the power of Bel is broken and his idols scattered to the winds?”

“This is blasphemy against the gods of Erinn!” exclaimed he who held the hounds in leash; and his words were echoed by the soldiery. “Let us take him hence, and bear him to the king.”

Mahon, beckoning to his retainers, who immediately followed him, stepped to the front and stood beside the Saint. As the soldiers observed him, a cry of vengeance burst from their ranks. He heeded it not, but silently looked on, awaiting the issue.

"There is the renegade," exclaimed Congal, "the traitor to Bel and his country!"

Mahon's eyes now flashed fire, and his hand instinctively sought the hilt of his dagger. But the Saint restrained him. Laying his hand on his shoulder, he said:—

"Peace; be still. They shall not have power to harm you."

Then raising in his hand the cross, he held it before them, and again addressed Congal:—

"Prince of Dalaradia, in my youth I tended swine upon these hills, and in thy father's service. I was his slave, and he was to me a good and generous master. But he was a heathen, and I often prayed that God would shed his light upon him. It pained my heart to think that he, so noble, generous and brave, should be the dupe of false and worthless gods; and that this land, so fair and fruitful, should be lost to Him who died to save it. It has pleased our God to look with deep compassion on you, and to send to you the light of gospel truth. Unworthy as I am to bear the glad tidings of salvation, yet to me is it given to teach to Erinn the only true faith of the living God. I bring with me the truth that shall illumine your soul, and raise you from darkness to light. I came to trample on your false gods and prophets, and rend, from the evil one, the allegiance due to Christ, whom I teach and adore. Behold the emblem of your salvation; the cross upon which He suffered and died, that you might obtain eternal life! Bow down your stubborn necks in adoration, and cast from you the false and idolatrous idols of Bel! For they are as false and vile as your Druidical priests are wicked and superstitious!"

But Congal and his followers moved not. A look of disdain passed over the features of the young prince, and in an angry tone he answered:—

"And does a slave, a swine-herd, dare to preach against the gods of Erinn? Now, by the sacred fire of Bel, if thy God has power to serve thee, call on him, for thou soon shalt want his aid to save thee from the death thy blasphemies deserve."

"Let us bring him to the king," shouted several in a breath, clanking their spears upon their shields, and moving toward

the Saint. "Let us let the dogs on him, and give chase," exclaimed their keeper; "it will be rare sport to follow in the flight."

"Leury is right," exclaimed his comrades. "Unloose them from the leash, but give the impostor a few paces of a start, as it will prolong the sport."

"And seize this traitor, this renegade Prince of Augher," shouted Congal in a loud voice, pointing to Mahon.

The latter was about to resist, backed by Ibar, Carbre, and Feilim, who drew their weapons, and stood ready for the struggle. But a look from the Saint deterred them; and Mahon, sheathing his weapon, suffered himself to be arrested. Two soldiers caught the Saint in their rude grasp, and led him a few paces in advance, one standing on each side to guard and detain him until the dogs were loosened. Leury, whose savage heart panted for the sacrifice which he thought was about to occur, released the blood-hounds, who bounded toward the Saint, yelling and yelping as if they sniffed blood and were impatient to taste it.

Leury hounded them on to attack the Saint, but contrary to his expectation, the latter did not run, in fear and trembling, when the dogs were loosed, and turned upon him; but turning his back on the path which he was expected to pursue, and his face toward his enemies, calmly awaited the approach of the fierce blood-hounds.

"Here! Bran, Luah, Buscar, Ban," shouted the savage Leury to the hounds, "catch him! seize him! Ah! on, good dogs, on! Tear the blasphemer and false preacher to pieces!"

The dogs, urged on by the hand that fed them, rushed toward the Saint, but stopped when they approached him, and whined piteously as if seized with sudden pain, and feared to touch him.

Uttering a fearful malediction, and striking the animal with the whip he carried, Leury again led them to the attack.

"Seize him, good Bran," he shouted to the foremost hound, patting him on the back. But the hound drew back in terror, and abjectly howled on the ground.

"Curse the dog," fiercely ejaculated Leury, "the prophet of the false God has woven his spells around!"

"Your blood be on your own head!" exclaimed Patrick, stepping to the side of Leury, and speaking in solemn and measured tones. "Your unrepentant heart has wrought its own destruction; and, the death thou hast for me prepared, thou surely now shall die. Dogs, seize your prey!"

With a wild yell that rung through the valley, the dogs sprang upon their former master, and, despite his frantic efforts to escape, tore the flesh off his bones; tore him limb from limb, and lapped his blood, in presence of the terrified spectators. Consternation seized upon the soldiery. Prince Congal, remembering his scornful words to the Saint, trembled and turned pale. The men who held Mahon in custody cut his bands, and tremblingly set him at liberty. A great fear took possession of their hearts, and longing to flee, they still remained, irresolute and uncertain what course to pursue. Even to the mind of Conall, the Christian, there was something in this unexpected interposition of God's Providence so terrible that, for a while, he stood rooted to the ground in astonishment and fear. Strange to tell, the first who recovered from their fright, was Feilim, who, breaking the bonds in which superstition had bound him, rushed towards the Saint; and, bending his knee, supplicated him to pray to his God to have mercy on him, and grant him the light of faith, as he believed in His name and strength. He was quickly followed by Mahon, Ibar, Carbre, Owen, and Conall, who reverently knelt and kissed the hem of his garment. Prince Congal and his followers looked at each other in mute surprise and wonder. Cathal, as if moved by some sudden thought, approached his brother, and, taking his hand, led him to the Saint. Then kneeling before him, asked his forgiveness and blessing. They were quickly followed by the remainder of the band; who, casting their spears aside, prostrated themselves on the ground, and worshipped the Christian's God, renouncing their idols, and the service of Bel.

St. Patrick returned thanks to God for this grand demonstration of His power, and ordered them to arise and carry the tidings of their conversion to their master, Milcho.

"And you, Cathal, and Congal," he said, addressing the

two young princes, "lie you to your father's court, and tell him that his former slave is approaching, bringing to him the word of life. Acquaint him of the things thou hast witnessed; tell him the reign of Bel is at an end, and that his idols are no longer recognized in the land. I shall meet him to-morrow, and put to shame his Druids and Priests of Bel. Before the word of God they shall flee, even as the snow before the sun."

Congal, whose heart was burning with the new faith, so wonderfully made manifest to him, approached Mahon, and rushing into his arms, hugged his head on his breast, and wept. The generous heart of Mahon was touched, and returning the caress, whispered in his ear that he would meet him on the morrow at his father's castle, and together listen to the discussion between the Saint and the Druids. Further conversation was stopped by St. Patrick, who was anxious for Congal to depart, and convey the news to the king. Receiving his blessing, the two young princes and their followers, hastened forward on the path which led to the castle of Milcho.

As they disappeared from sight, the Saint, beckoning the Prince of Augher and his companions to follow, entered the tent which was spread at the base of the knoll, and was immediately joined by those whom he had invited to his presence.

## CHAPTER XII.

## THE EVE OF SYBILLA'S DEPARTURE FOR THE SACRED GROVES.

I am a thing of feelings,  
 And have of late been sickly, as, alas!  
 Thou knowest of sufferings more than mine, my love!  
 In watching me.

— *Werner.*

The sun shone brightly on Milcho's tower, and on the pleasant waters of the Braid. Without, all was gladness and beauty, peace and joy; but within the castle walls, no sound of joy was heard; no din of revelry echoed through the corridors; no sound of life broke the dull monotony of silence, that reigned throughout the vast and antique pile. Milcho, in silent sullenness held communion with none; and unattended and alone, paced the battlements, gazing, with eager eye, on the dim and distant forest, as if he could pierce through the gloom, and see beyond, the coming of his deadliest foes. Since the departure of the two princes, his thoughts had grown more sullen and morose; and a deep and deadly hatred of Mahon and the Christians had taken possession of his heart. He watched for the return of his sons, with a feverish impatience, and cursed the lagging hours of their absence.

On the second evening after their departure, he was visited by Conra, the Druid; who remained in his apartments long after the lights in the castle were extinguished, and the midnight bell had ceased to chime. Save to Conra and Sybilla Milcho gave audience to none; and even Fergus, the aged harper, was denied his presence.

A gloomy melancholy had settled on Sybilla's heart. Her beauty, was still as bright as ever, and perhaps enhanced by the hue of the lily, which had lately usurped the place of the rose, adding a more fascinating charm to the wondrous beauty

of her jet-black eyes. But a shade of sorrow lingered on her brow; and at times a half-suppressed sigh heaved her fluttering bosom, which told of the conflict that raged within. She could not hide from the loving gaze of Una, the pain and misery that were gnawing at her heart. The latter knew, too well, the cause of her sorrow; and endeavored, with all the sweet and gentle sympathy of her nature, to banish and eradicate it.

But each interview with her father and Conra, added to Sybilla's grief; and though she did not disclose to Una the nature of these interviews, her foster-sister intuitively divined their character. The Druid and her father were preparing her mind for the great change which was about to take place in her life, and buoying her with hopes of happiness and peace, which would be hers, when she became an inmate of the holy sisterhood. But Una saw the roses fade from Sybilla's cheek; and her step, that was once elastic as the bounding fawn's, become slow and measured. The old fire still shone in her eye, but it was evident that her heart was being blighted by the dread sacrifice she was about to offer, on the altar of parental duty.

She returned the fond and affectionate caresses of Una, as of old, and discoursed with pride and pleasure, of her brother's love for her, frequently expressing a wish that their union would occur before she became a vestal. But the name of Mahon never escaped her lips, since the day of his departure; and she forbade Una to mention it. When not engaged in conversation with her foster-sister, or the King, she was in the habit of seating herself on the bank of the river and pouring over the book which Conra had given her.

One evening Una stole unperceived upon her, and as she approached the huge oak, under which Sybilla was seated, she saw the book fall listlessly from her hand, and the fair student gaze long and intently on the river. There was a sad and melancholy look in her face, and her long dark hair which fell in dishevelled masses on her neck, gave to her countenance a sadder and paler tinge than it really wore. Una was about to rush towards her, and seat herself by her

side; when at that moment, Sybilla unconscious of being observed, began to sing, in a low, sweet voice, a plaintive and mournful melody. Una stopped to listen, and, ere the song was concluded, felt the hot tears trickling down her cheeks:—

## I.

Rest, weary heart, and sigh no more,  
Thy days are done, thy toils are o'er;  
Like some lone barque engulfed at sea,  
The storm-king's wrath has vanquished thee.  
'Tis vain lost pleasure to deplore,  
Rest, weary heart, and sigh no more.

## II.

The sun may shine with fervid glow,  
The summer breezes sweetly blow;  
The wild and wandering bird and bee,  
Sip honeyed sweets from flower and tree,  
And haply rest when day is o'er,  
But thou, poor heart, can feel no more.

## III.

'Twas sweet to hear the magic tone,  
That breathed of love for thee alone;  
'Twas sweet to dream of that loved name,  
That woke in thee, proud hopes of fame;  
But fame, like love, lies wounded, sore  
Rest, weary heart, and sigh no more.

## IV.

The wild-bird's note will fill the vale,  
The hawthorn blossom scent the gale,  
But she, who loved the valley's shade,  
Shall in its breast be lowly laid,  
All toil, and care and sorrow o'er,  
To rest her heart and sigh no more.

"O! Sybilla," cried Una, rushing from her hiding place, and throwing herself into her arms, "Why are you so melancholy, and why do you sing in such a sad and tearful strain?"

"Because my heart is sad, dear Una, and the song was only the echo of its thoughts and feelings," answered Sybilla, returning Una's embrace and burying her head in her bosom.

"Do not give way to your sorrow, Sybilla, it is but a dark and passing cloud which appears in the sky at nightfall; but



which must dissolve and disappear in the rays of the rising sun. Its darkness has eclipsed your heart for a moment; but the sunshine of the morning will dissipate its murky shadows and chase from its path the clouds which have enveloped it. I know you are unhappy; but why, Sybilla, do you try to wreathe, with a smile, the painful sensations preying on your heart? Has your Una been so wayward and wild, and so lost to confidence, and sense, that her sister fears to confide in her?"

"I have been yearning to open my sorrows to your heart, dear Una, but I feared to add to those you already bear."

"I have none Sybilla, only for thee."

"Then thou wilt soon be a happy girl, Una; for, as to-morrow, the day-god sinks in the wave, thy Sybilla shall enter the sacred groves, where she will forget all her earthly sorrow, and—her earthly love. So my father and Conra have ordained."

"Does not thy heart rebel against the decision of the King and Conra?" asked Una.

"No!" replied Sybilla, "Willingly I enter the holy sisterhood, thankful to the gods for a choice that few can get or claim. Why should my heart rebel? Once it was weak and trusted in the fickle, faithless smiles of fortune, and believed, with one to share its joys and sorrows, it could fondly bear life's burden to the close. It was a vain and foolish thought, and deeply have the gods revenged its perfidy to them. He whom I loved and trusted, was a traitor to his country and his god. My brothers loved him fondly as myself, and trusted in his honor. What has he become? To-day, the dearest brother of my heart is on his track, and follows on his path to bound him down to death. If he escape, a guilty traitor lives, and if he dies there's one the less in Erinn. Wronged, outraged in my feelings and my love, the sunshine of youth's happy morning dimmed, why should I linger amid scenes of woe, when in the cloistered shades, my thoughts will find, if not content, at least repose."

"And so, it is decided on the morrow you depart," said Una mournfully, shading her eyes with her hand to conceal her tears.

"To-morrow my brothers are expected to return, and Contra with a train of attendant priests and vestals, shall be here to escort me to the sacred groves. Ova, Elie and you, at eventide, shall take farewell of Sybilla."

Her voice sunk to a whisper, and, despite her efforts to subdue them, she could not restrain her tears. It was the first heavy grief which Una's heart had known, this sudden parting from her sister, as she fondly styled her; and, though she had learned from childhood to expect the event, the sudden announcement of the separation, brought with it a feeling fraught with unmitigated sorrow.

"I can scarcely realize, dearest Sybilla," she said in a low and tender tone, "that to-morrow will place a gulf between us, and that we who have ever and always been so near and dear to each other, shall separate for life."

"But it will not sever our friendship Una; we can meet at Bealtinne when the great festival of the gods is held at Tara."

"Ah! but Sybilla, who will supply your place when you are gone?"

Sybilla put her lips to Una's ear and softly murmured "Congal." Una blushed, and catching Sybilla's dark ringlets, held them to her face to hide the rising color on her cheeks.

"He has now been gone for two days," continued Sybilla, "and it is time he had returned. The very thought of the errand on which he is bent, sends a shudder through my soul. I long and yet I dread for his return."

"His errand may be a fruitless one," returned Una, watching her looks as if to read there the unspoken thoughts of her heart; "He whom he went to seek, is one, if rumor belies him not, who will not surrender or sell his liberty, at any man's beck or bidding; and I fear me, their meeting will lead to blood."

"And I am the unhappy cause of it all," exclaimed Sybilla, hiding her face in her hands, as if to shut from sight the dark scene which her imagination pictured.

"Nay, if the gods ordained it," replied Una consolingly, "it was not in mortal power to prevent it."

"The fault was mine, Una. I was false to my vows, and the gods are already wreaking their vengeance on me. But I am resolved, if penitence and tears can wash my sin away, my future life shall atone for the erring and sinful past. As a daughter of Bel and in the holy sanctuary of the Druids, I shall forget all earthly desires, and live for our God alone."

Una was about to reply when a rustling among the branches suddenly startled her, and looking up she beheld the dark face of Conra the Druid standing before them.

The semblance of a smile gleamed on his dark and sinister visage, and his eyes sparkled with pleasure at Sybilla's words. He had been concealed in the underbrush, and was an interested listener to all they had uttered.

"Thou hast spoken well, my daughter," he said, addressing Sybilla, as soon as she had recovered from the sudden start, which his appearance had given, "none are happier than the virgins of Bel. Thy sisters await thee in the sacred groves; a spotless raiment is prepared for thee; thy fire is burning on the altar, and the holy priests shall sound the harp to welcome thy coming. The sacred maidens who throng the groves are weaving for thee, a chaplet which shall adorn thy brow; and when thy sacrifice is offered on the altar the gods will accept it as thy gift, and be well pleased. We shall come for thee to-morrow, and with holy song and hymn, conduct thee to the sanctuary. Until then pray to the gods, and may they favor thee as thou deservest."

Wrapping his long mantle around him, and bowing lowly to Sybilla, he departed, taking the path that led to the castle.

His words sunk deeply into the heart of Sybilla. The solemnity of the scene in which she would be the central figure on the morrow, and the dread ordeal through which she would have to pass, conspired to fill her mind with serious and solemn thoughts, and add to the melancholy which filled her heart. The Druid's words had imparted a greater vigor to her resolution, and swelled her breast with a more ardent desire to consummate the will of her father. Her sense of duty to her parent, combined with her own wish to enter the sisterhood, served to allay her grief at parting from the

world ; but despite her utmost efforts to shake it off, a forboding of disaster and evil brooded over her spirits.

She remained silent and abstracted long after Conra had disappeared ; and Una, who was also communing with her own thoughts, uttered not a word. At length Sybilla, heaving a deep sigh, picked up the book which lay at her feet ; and waking her companion from her reverie, walked slowly towards the castle.

Early next morning, as the sun was rising over the eastern hills, Milcho was awake and stirring. A frown was on his brow, and his sunken eyes and haggard look told, that he had passed a sleepless night. Stepping on the battlements, he turned his face toward the east, and gazed long and anxiously in that direction. With a disappointed look he at length turned away ; and, with rapid stride, paced uneasily to and fro on the walls. As the sun mounted higher his uneasiness increased, and with troubled and eager gaze, his eye wandered, ever and anon, toward the river, and the path that led to the forest. But no sign of living thing was to be seen ; no sound was heard but the song of the birds and the ripple of the gladsome river. The castle itself, was still as death. The few retainers who remained, fearful of displeasing their gloomy lord, busied themselves in whatever way they could to pass the day which hung heavily on them, and shunned his presence.

He had given up the chase ; all his former pastimes were abandoned ; and only when not engaged in his chamber with the Druid or his daughter, Sybilla, was he seen by his dependents. His household seemed to be imbued with the gloomy spirit of the master ; they seldom spoke, and then only in whispers, as if they feared the sound of their own voices. Una, accompanied by Elie and Ova, was in the habit of straying through the woods, or wandering on the river's banks during the greater part of the day, in order to escape the painful silence and dull monotony which reigned within the castle. Sometimes, Fergus, taking his harp, would seat himself beneath the walls, and try to amuse the king with some of the old airs he formerly loved, and which he knew

were his special favorites. But they had no effect on the troubled soul of Milcho. There was a wound in his heart which music could not cure, and vengeance alone could heal. There was a demon tugging at his vitals, which would never be appeased until the Prince of Augher was in his power, and the Christian slave, Sicur, destroyed. The curse upon his house should be averted, were it to be purchased by the sacrifice of every follower of the swine-herd, whose figure was ever rising up before him, and who, even in his dreams, he saw, as it were, with a naked sword, pointing to his breast. He cursed the Christian in his heart as he walked the ramparts; and prayed the gods to annihilate or deliver him into his hands.

He longed for the coming of Congal, and with burning brain, watched, unceasingly, for the glint of his spear in the distance. It was now the third day since his departure; and, as yet no tidings of him had been heard. The thought of defeat, in the object of his mission, never entered his proud, pagan heart; he did not surmise that any unsurmountable difficulties lay in his path, or that he would not soon overtake Mahon, and capture him. But he remembered that his orders were imperative not to return without him, and, if necessary, pursue him into his own territory. This last thought added a more poignant pang to his troubled spirit; and the idea of his son's capture by Tir-owen's retainers suddenly flashed upon him. But he dismissed it as unworthy of his name, and of a scion of Dalaradia. Congal and Cathal would return with the traitor, and the vengeance of the gods would be appeased.

Such were the thoughts of Milcho, as he restlessly paced his weary beat, in the lone silence of the morning. Grown tired at length, and heavy with the thoughts that oppressed him, he was about retiring to his chamber, when he observed Sybilla approaching. Tenderly he saluted her, and bade her welcome. Seating themselves, with their faces turned toward the river, they remained silent for a moment gazing on the stream. But their hearts were full, and each was eager to court sympathy from the other.

"Sybilla," began Milcho, taking her hand in his and looking with a father's pride into her beautiful face, "to-day, perhaps, shall seal our destiny; and all the sufferings we have so lately endured, shall pass away and be forgotten. If Congal returns this evening, thou shalt be borne in triumph to thy chosen abode."

"But should he not return, father, may I not go?"

"No!" he replied, a dark frown returning to his face. "No, I have sworn on the altar of Bel that on the day my daughter records her vestal vows, on that day shall Mahon die!"

A shudder passed through her frame as she heard the words, and she feared to look upon him, so fiercely did he pronounce them.

"If he return not to-day," he continued, "at sunset, I shall send a messenger to intercept Conra and his train. It will be but another day in the march of life, and will soon be over. Conra must wait; he and the gods are not more impatient than I am. We discussed this question last night, and he will be prepared for any news I send him. Like myself, he marvels much at Congal's delay."

"And think you not, dear father, that some accident may have befallen him?"

"No! it is unlikely. The traitor may have hid in the forest or mountain gorges, and baffled, for a time, the hunters on his path; but he cannot escape."

Sybilla suppressed a sigh and murmured a prayer to the gods for his deliverance, in secret, and answered:—

"I am prepared and ready to enter the sisterhood to-night, if it is so ordained; to me it is not a sacrifice, for I know it will bring to you peace, dear father, and to me repose."

"It will bring to us happiness, Sybilla, and continue to our house that honor and glory which the greatest in Erin would be proud to share."

"That thought will uphold me in my righteousness, and nerve me to become more deserving the favor of the gods."

"The day on which thou shalt consummate thy vow, shall be indeed a day of happiness to me."

"Then may it be soon, for I know thy heart is sore and

heavy with sad thoughts. Thou art oppressed with grief, and so laden with the burden of thy woe, that even thy children fear to approach thee."

"Have I failed in my love to thee, Sybilla?"

"No; but there are others equally deserving to share thy thoughts. Sybilla, much as she desires her father's love, wishes him to share it with her sisters. He seems to have forgotten them, lately, and cares not to caress them as was his wont. Remember, dear father, they will be here to love you when I am gone."

"In truth, Sybilla, you have reminded me of a duty which I have neglected. My thoughts have been so centred on thee, that I took no heed of them."

"See! they are leaving the castle and going to the woods," exclaimed Sybilla, taking over the battlements and pointing to Una and her sisters as they passed through the gate. "Shall I call them to receive your kiss? Oh! it will make them so happy."

"Do, my child," answered her father, affectionately patting her cheek, and gazing with delight into her dark, dancing eyes. "Thou art worthy of thy proud race, as noble as thou art loving, and in thy presence I forget my sorrow."

Sybilla, on being perceived by those below, beckoned them toward her; and with eager delight they rushed to her presence. But seeing the king they involuntarily drew back; his smile, however, soon reassured them, and as he opened his arms to receive them, they sprang forward and kissed him. Sybilla was delighted, and her joy shone in her face.

It was a beautiful group, and one which a painter would love to delineate. The king, forgetting for the moment the thoughts that troubled him, bent down and kissed each fair face, as it was presented to him; and laying his hand lovingly on each, gave to them his blessing. Then, as he stood erect, his tall and massive figure drawn to its full height; his long and flowing beard falling over his bosom; his eye sparkling with the momentary pleasure that filled his soul; and his noble countenance beaming with a smile; this, added to the peculiar, but becoming and magnificent costume which he

wore, proclaimed him "every inch a king." The queenly form of Sybilla, in stature above her sisters, so grand and impressive in its surpassing symmetry and beauty, presented a very striking contrast to those by whom she was surrounded. Not but all were lovely, and bright as the summer sun that beamed upon them, and were gifted by nature with her noblest attributes; but physically and intellectually she was a model which a sculptor or poet would like to portray, and which the most aspiring of her sex would wish to imitate.

Ova and Elie were gifted with the sweet and pleasing expression of countenance which we see depicted by the old masters, in their portraits of the Madonna, and which we sometimes, but rarely meet, in those meek and beautiful faces which we see so frequently beneath the sable hood, which denotes the sublime vocation of its wearer—the Sisters of Charity. Though on the verge of womanhood, they were children in thought and feeling; and the girlish pleasures they indulged in were harmless and innocent as their hearts were pure. Like Una, they were overflowing with mirth and cheerfulness; but when anything occurred to mar their mirth, or a passing cloud came between them, they always ran to Sybilla for advice and counsel. Their father regarded them as children; but as he now looked upon them, he could perceive that, physically, they were blooming into maturity.

He permitted them to remain for an hour, and, seemingly, well pleased with their mirth, laughed at their frolics, and heartily mingled in their sport. Sybilla, believing that her kind father had participated long enough in their gambols to be fatigued, suggested that they pursue the amusements marked out for the day; and, in the meantime, let him retire to procure refreshment needed after a sleepless and weary night.

The young ladies, though wishful to stay, and loth to depart, again embraced the king and Sybilla, and following Una, hied away toward the banks of the Braid. Milcho watched them until they disappeared in the dense foliage of the forest; and then, with a sigh, took his daughter's arm and proceeded to his private chamber in the tower.



## CHAPTER XIII.

## THE ADVANCE OF THE CHRISTIAN HOST.

"Lo!  
I've lit the lamp which lights us to the stars!"  
*Sardanapalus.*

The softening influence of his daughter's conversation was visible on the countenance of Milcho, as later in the day they left the apartment and again stood on the battlements. His face wore a more placid expression, and his mind seemed more at ease. Her countenance shone with a holy resignation and love, when she looked into his, which seemed to endow it with even a brighter and more exalted beauty than ever before beamed upon it. The day was calm and beautiful. Unclouded and serene, the August sun looked down upon Dalarradia. A slight breeze, which gently ruffled the tree-tops, wafted its cooling freshness to their senses. The peaceful repose in which the valley lay was unbroken, save by the song of the birds and the rippling of the stream. A halo of light hung over that quiet valley, and a mantle of beauty and brightness enfolded it in its embrace. The picture outspread before them, in all its enchanting loveliness, infused a brighter gleam of sunshine into their hearts; and still farther served to calm the troubled brow of Milcho.

"Methinks, father," said Sybilla, as her eye feasted on the scene, "that never before did the sun-god shine so fair upon Dalarradia. Never have I seen so sweet a summer, or so bright a day as this. The smile of our god seems more beautiful and potent, since I repented of my weakness; and my heart is more at rest."

"The eye of Bel penetrates the human heart. He brooks not perfidy in his votaries; and the light of his eye will dim

and blast, with death, these Christian dogs who rail against his power!"

"Their vain and impious creed, the product of some barbarous land, can find no foothold here while Conra and his holy Druids minister at his shrine."

"'Twere pity if it did, Sybilla. There are bold hearts in Erin, and did we embrace it, our glory and our freedom were undone. Lagari, the soft son of Nial, slumbers on his couch when his hand should grasp the spear. He has shed no lustre on his reign, and while he toys with the soft tresses of the Lagenian maidens, or tarries at the wine cup in the banquet hall, his borders are left defenceless to the incursions of barbarians; and idolaters are left free and unmolested to practice their base and degrading doctrines."

"But surely he hearkens not to their teachings, father? He cannot be so unmindful or so base as to forget the glory of his country, and his duty to the gods!"\*

"Search your own heart, Sybilla, and try to find a parallel."

The blood forsook her cheeks, and a tremor shook her frame, as her father slowly pronounced the words; and trembling, leant on the battlements for support. By an effort, she suppressed the feelings that took possession of her, and boldly raised her eyes; but his face was averted, and his gaze was riveted on the highway that led from Tir-owen to the castle. His words, though they stung her to the soul, had not a taint of displeasure or contempt in them. They were spoken more in sorrow than in anger.

"'Twas but to-day, dear father, and a few hours ago, that your Sybilla vowed her heart was Bel's and Bel's only. Before the day-god sinks to rest, that vow will be consummated."

\* "THE ARD RIAGH.—There was indeed, in Erin, a chief superior to all the rest, who was called the great king (Ard Riagh), or king of the country, and who was chosen by a general assembly of chiefs of the different provinces; but this elective president of the national confederation, swore to the whole nation, the same oaths which the chiefs of the tribes swore to their respective tribes—that of invariably observing the ancient laws and hereditary customs."—*Thierry's Norman Conquest*.

"I did not mean to pain you, my child. But the heart is prone to error, and when you, a daughter of the royal line of Nial, could for a moment forget your duty, why not Laegeri? Weakness does not alone belong to woman. All men are not born with stern and rugged souls. Some are brave and noble; others weak and vacillating. But as you appear before me now, I feel, I know, that there is no danger, however fearful, no ordeal however painful, and no sacrifice too dreadful that you could not undergo for your country and religion?"

"To me it is no sacrifice to devote myself to Bel. I pine for the hour when I shall become a vestal. But did my religion and my country require that I should suffer, believe me, that the daughter of Milcho of Dalaradia, would be equal to the test."

"Spoken like a daughter of Erinn, and the daughter of a race of kings! Were Nial still our Ard Riagh you were fitted to share his throne. But who is greater than a bride of Bel?"

"None. To be such my great ambition leads!"

"Thou art worthy of thy house, Sybilla! Despite the dark forbodings which have lately filled my soul, it shall still retain its splendor and glory, and Dalaradia exult in pride and fame."

"It has always ranked with the greatest at Tara, for deeds of arms, chivalry, music and poetry, and never shall its fame be dimmed by me."

"Thou speakest truly, child, and never wert thou so dear to me as now. The image of thy beautiful mother rises up before me, as I gaze on thee. Thou hast all her beauty, and the spirit of thy brave brothers, Congal and Cathal! Would that they were come! My heart would be at peace did they bring with them the traitor Mahon, and the Christian Sicut. I long to embrace them for the deed. 'Tis time they had arrived."

"The day-god is yet high in the West, and they may come before Conra and his train arrives."

"May Belus grant it. But 'tis time they were here."

"Some one approaches by the river's bank. I see them emerging from the trees."

"It must be they. We expect none else."

"No, it is Una and my sisters. They are running."

"They come to tell of Congal's near approach."

"It may be so. Now, as they come near, I can perceive their hair dishevelled and their cheeks flushed from their hurried race. They bear some tidings."

"'Tis of Congal. Beckon them to the battlements."

Sybilla did as commanded, and with a smile saw her sisters approach. Their long hair, loose and floating around them, their dresses torn and in disarray, and the strange look that flashed from their eyes, told that they bore unusual tidings, and that something of an extraordinary character had occurred. Breathless and panting they flung themselves on their knees before the king, unable in their excitement to utter a word.

"What means this unwonted behavior?" impatiently exclaimed Milcho. "Rise, and tell me have you seen your brothers?"

"We have seen greater than our brothers, and greater than thou, father. We have met one even greater than the Ard Riagh himself," replied Ova, raising her clasped hands to give emphasis to her words.

"He is greater than Bel, and tramples him into the dust," exclaimed Elie, bowing her head.

"What means this, Una? Has the evil one taken possession of these girls, that they have become so demented?"

"They but speak the truth, O King! What they have seen I myself have witnessed."

"Then in the name of Belus and all the gods, do not keep us longer in suspense. Speak!"

"We have met the holy Sicur, and have become Christians."

"God of my Fathers! can this be true?" exclaimed Milcho, smiting his forehead with his hand and staggering against the battlements.

Sybilla remained mute and motionless as a statue. She seemed transfixed by astonishment and terror. Her distended

nostrils and heaving bosom told plainer than words, of the conflict that raged within. Una heeded not the impression her words created, but continued——

"We met him in the valley, by the Braid. Vast multitudes were flocking around him, and in the face of open day, he declaimed against Bel, and performed miracles that none, unless armed with the power of a god could accomplish. He preached to us and taught us the precepts of his faith. We listened and believed. Casting forever from us, the spells which the Druids wove, we embraced his creed and were baptized Christians. And, O king Milcho! thou who hast been to me a friend and father, go forth to meet him! Sybilla——"

"Talk not to me, base ingrate! Thou hast brought shame and dishonor on the house that sheltered thee," exclaimed Sybilla, recovering from her stupor and taking her place by her father's side.

"Get thee hence!" thundered the king. "There is pollution in thy touch. As for thou, degenerate daughters of mine, I shame that thou shouldst call me father."

"O father——"

"O Sybilla"—pleaded Ova and Elie, entreatingly. But they would not listen. Spurning them from him, Milcho turned to Sybilla, who, bursting into tears, flung herself on his bosom.

"Would that thy brothers were here, Sybilla," he exclaimed in agony, pressing her to his heart.

"We are here, father. Cathal and I are here," exclaimed Congal as he and his brother at the moment appeared.

"Ha! thou art welcome. No son of mine at least, shall ever bring disgrace upon my name. Where is this Sieur and the traitor Mahon?"

"They approach, father, and will soon be here."

"Then may the vengeance of the angry gods fall down and crush me, if they do not perish within an hour!"

"Thou canst not harm them, father. They are protected by a mightier power than the false gods of Erie!"

Milcho started. Not daring to believe his ears, yet fearful

of the truth, and withal hoping that he misinterpreted the words of his son he turned from him to Cathal, and from the latter to Sybilla, who had withdrawn from his arms and dried her tears at her brothers' approach. But neither spoke nor moved.

"Didst thou not say, Congal, that the prisoners are approaching?"

"Sicur and Mahon are approaching, father, but not as prisoners. They come as liberators. Sicur is the servant of the Most High God, to whom is given the power of crushing the idols of the land. Before him they are dumb, and crumble at his touch. The Druids cannot prevail against him. The great fall down and worship the God whom he adores. The wonders he performs surpass the compass of men's thoughts. We could not harm him. By a look he changed our hearts, and our weapons became powerless in our hands. We met to war against him, but he changed our hatred to love; and our stubborn hearts were filled with the light of truth. We sought him in hate, but his word prevailed; and now we worship the God of Sicur; we are Christians!"

"Accursed may you be, and thrice accursed be him who has wrought this evil on me!" exclaimed Milcho, unable longer to control his passion. A fierce war waged within his breast. He grasped his dagger fiercely, and a dark scowl overspread his countenance. Sybilla, weak and trembling, pressed her hands upon her bosom, to still the angry tumult that tugged at her heart. The king's rage was fearful. With an angry malediction he approached his son, and brandishing his dagger, fiercely exclaimed:—

"Base son of mine, my first born and best beloved, I could strike thee dead at my feet for thy treachery, but that I know this Christian dog has encompassed thee with his spells. But the evil he has wrought shall be atoned for, and avenged. He has caused my own children to rebel against me; and, by the glamour of his tongue and subtlety of his heart, has invaded my very household. The weak and ignoble swine-herd conspires against his master. But though he has inveigled the hearts of my children, I have still some true followers

left; and, by the light of Bel, this base-born slave shall reap the reward of his crimes. Ho! Warder, sound the signal to man the battlements, and let every Dalaradian warrior hasten to his post!"

"Father, your commands are vain. Of all your warriors and chiefs not one remains to answer your call. They are with Sicur, and are no longer worshippers of the sun-god or the idols of Dalaradia. Even now, you can hear them advancing to crush them with their hands."

Milcho looked in the direction indicated by his son, and could hear the murmur of a mighty multitude approaching. No warrior answered to his call. They had deserted him, and their treachery smote him to the heart. Dashing the dagger, in anger, against the battlements, he looked sternly at his sons. Cathal and Congal, joined by their sisters and Una, who had lingered in a niche, fell on their knees, and implored him not to meet the Saint in anger, but accord him a hearing. They prayed and besought him to curb his passion, and, with patience, hear and judge for himself. But their words were lost on Milcho. The stubborn pagan spurned them with contempt, and ordered them from his presence. Fearful that his wrath would overpower his reason, and urge him to some dark deed, perhaps murder, the brothers obeyed, and with their young sisters and Una, silently left the castle.

Turning to Sybilla, who now stood calm and erect, with folded arms, he looked into her face. It was pale, but courage and determination were written there. Her eye unflinchingly met his, and as the sounds came nearer to their ears, he addressed her:—

"Of all my children and followers, not one remain true!"

"Yes, father, there is one—Sybilla. Test her love."

"Will you remain true to the faith of Bel, and spurn this swine-herd who approaches?"

"I will."

"Will you meet death before you break your vow?"

"Yes, if my father determines so!"

"It is so determined. In one hour I shall be in the paradise of Belus."

"Then I accompany you. I am ready for the sacrifice."

"Then one last embrace on earth, my daughter. I shall fire the castle, and together we shall wing our flight to the gods!"

"Praise be to Belus! Such a death were better than a life of slavery. I shall meet it unflinchingly; and while the flames crackle around me, turn my eyes to the sun-god, and my last look shall win a smile from him."

"Noble Sybilla! This moment repays me for all the tortures which have wrung my heart, at the desertion and treachery of my children."

Clasping her to his bosom, father and daughter remained for a moment in a last, loving embrace. Gently disengaging himself from her arms, he kissed her cheek, and leaving her alone on the battlements, hastened below to execute the fearful and desperate deed he had planned.

Bolting the large iron gates which barred the progress of the advancing enemy, and gathering all the inflammable matter within his reach, he applied a burning pine torch, and, in a moment, the castle was in a blaze. He gained Sybilla's side as the Christian host, led by Saint Patrick, appeared before the walls. At the same time Conra, the Druid, and a train of priests, could be perceived moving, in another direction, toward the castle.



## CHAPTER XIV.

## THE DOOM OF THE UNBELIEVER.

O! the loud flames upward springing!  
 O! that fierce yell within  
 And, without, that stormy laughter!  
 Like rooks across a sunset winging,  
 Dark they dashed through glare and din,  
 Under rain of beam and rafter!  
 Oh! that death-shriek heavenward ringing;  
 O! that wondrous silence after.

---

She stood like a queen, and her vesture green,  
 Shone out as a laurel sun-lighted;  
 And she sang a wild song like a mourner's *keen*,  
 With an Angel's triumph united.

—*Aubrey De Vere.*

Mahon's heart beat high with hope, and sweet emotions mingled in his soul, when Congal, the friend of his boyhood, flung away his spear, and, with all the fervor which the new faith inspired, rushed into his arms. How different were the feelings that possessed him *now*, from those that had perplexed and tortured him, since his last meeting with Sybilla. The extraordinary power displayed by Patrick, the Christian Apostle, at first bewildered his mind, and he looked with fear upon him. But the good Conall was ever by his side; and his loving promptings, and wonderful faith and hope, soothed and inspired him, until a glowing ardor burned within him.

As they entered the tent, St. Patrick beckoned them to seats which were arranged around it. His own stood in the centre, while Conall, Owen, and the young Prince occupied those nearest the Saint. For hours they sat spell-bound, listening to his words. It seemed as if a ray of the divine love, which burned within his own heart, was imparted by his eloquence

to theirs. All their former timidity vanished; their doubts disappeared like the mists of the morning, and a burning and consuming love filled their veins. Before that holy man of God, the clouds of superstition, which had veiled their souls, were dissipated; the mysteries and evil rites of Druidic worship, which had so long trammelled them, were dispelled; and they stood erect in the sun-light of God's love, strengthened, ransomed and redeemed.

Fourteen centuries have since passed away. Time, in his flight, has wrought many changes. Nations have fallen. Empires have crumbled into dust. But the faith planted by the despised swine-herd of Slieve-Mis, still lives and burns as intensely bright in the Irish heart as when first taught in the valley of the Braid. Nourished by the hand of God, it lives and fructifies; and the Word spoken on Slieve-Mis, has been wafted to the uttermost ends of the earth. *Esto Perpetua*.

At the time appointed, they set out for Milcho's castle. Their road lay along the winding banks of the river. The Saint, dressed in his sacred robes, and followed by his acolytes, led the advance. After them came Conall, Mahon, and Owen, with Ibar, Feilim, Carbre and Bratha. As they proceeded, hundreds of people, bursting down from the hills, or swarming from the valleys, joined them on the march. The fame of the miracle performed so recently, and on the very ground they trod, and the violent death of Leury, had spread with lightning rapidity; and, the people, astounded at the deeds of the extraordinary man among them, left their homes, and hastened to see and hear him.

Mahon, with beating heart, gazed upward to Slieve-Mis, as its tall summit appeared to view, above the surrounding plain. He had often trod its wooded sides in chase of the red deer and wolf, and on his return, with bounding heart, looked upwards to the battlements of the castle to catch a glimpse of Sybilla, or win a smile from her. A few turns more on the curved banks of the river, and he would be approaching the woods where he had often sighed her name to the summer winds, or left the chase to indulge, alone, in day-dreams of hope and love. Breathing a prayer to God and His Blessed

Mother, for her speedy conversion, he hopefully journeyed on.

Nor was Saint Patrick himself unmoved at the scene around him. What boundless recollections must have crowded upon his memory, as he traversed each well-known spot! Full thirty years had elapsed since his flight, and the angelic vision which had made that flight so memorable; yet the place was little changed, and even yet the natural features of that part of Dalaradia are scarcely altered. The very name of the stately basaltic hill, now called Slemish, and then Slieve-Mis, bears the same sound, while its appearance remains the same.\*

When within a mile of the castle, where the banks sloped gracefully to the river, St. Patrick halted. Mahon, who had fallen behind his comrades, busy with his own thoughts, was roused from his reverie by the occurrence. The crowd was eagerly pressing forward, and exclamations of wonder and delight were heard among them. Crushing his way through the dense throng, he, with some difficulty, reached the side of the Saint. About twenty minutes had been consumed in the effort. Before him he saw three young and beautiful maidens, with heads bent down, and their hands clasped in humility on their bosoms. Their long tresses fell in abundant waves, far down their backs, and their costumes bespoke their high rank. He could only see the outline of one of their faces, as the Saint stood before him with his hand uplifted over their heads.

"Believe ye, that by baptism you put off the sins of your father and your mother?" asked the Saint, and the three maidens, in soft and musical tones, answered together:—

"We believe."

"Believe ye in repentance after sin?"

"We believe."

"Believe ye in life after death? Believe ye the resurrection at the day of judgment?"

"We believe."

"Believe ye the unity of the church?"

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\* Life of St. Patrick.

"We believe."

"Then I shall baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, and make you children of the only true and living God!"

The voice of the multitude was hushed. They believed solemn and mysterious rite was pending. They held their breath, and, with bowed heads, awaited its termination. They spoke not, nor questioned each other, for their souls were filled with wonder and dread, and they knew not what change this man might work in Erin.\*

The rite being concluded, St. Patrick blessed them, and pointing in the direction of Slieve-Mis, said:—

"Daughters of Milcho, return to the castle, and tell you father, the King of Dalaradia, that Sicur, his former slave and bondsman, has returned to his old master, and brings with him the Word that shall give him light and life."

The maidens bounded away at his bidding, and soon disappeared among the trees.

Mahon heard the words of the Saint, and looking toward the spot where the maidens stood, beheld in them, Una, with Ova and Elie, the sisters of Sybilla. A wild and passionate hope took possession of his heart, that their unexpected and speedy conversion, would result in that of Sybilla and her father and yielding to the influence of the thought, he involuntarily flung his arms above his head, and cried in a loud voice—"Blessed be the God of Patrick! The Christians' God!" The multitude re-echoed the shout and with hosannas on their tongues again resumed their march.

They had proceeded but a few paces when a hand was laid on Mahon's shoulder; and turning, he saw behind him a re-

- 
- \* "While he spoke, men say that the highest tide  
On the shore beside Colpa ceased to sink;  
And they say the white deer by Mulla's side,  
O'er the green margin bending forbore to drink;  
That the Brandon eagle forgot to soar;  
That no leaf stirred in the wood by Lee;  
Such stupor hung the island o'er,  
For none might guess what the end might be."

*"Innisfail and other poems." by Aubrey de Vere*

tainer of Milcho. He was panting and breathless, and by his eagerness seemed the bearer of some important intelligence.

"I have news for you, Prince, which I think it my duty to communicate."

"And what is it, good Artgal?"

"Conra the Druid, with a train of priests and followers, is now approaching Milcho's castle, to bring his daughter, Sybilla, to the sacred groves."

A pang shot through Mahon's heart, for well he knew that once in the recesses of the Druid's groves, the Ard Riagh himself, dare not approach her. Endeavoring to smother the fierce thoughts that rushed through his brain, he eagerly questioned—

"How know you this, Artgal?"

"I, with the rest of Milcho's followers have deserted him, and wish to be a Christian. Being on guard on the battlements I was the last to leave. The King and the Princess Sybilla were there, while I was pacing my rounds; and from some words which dropped from them, and from the eager glances which they ever and anon directed toward the path which leads to the sacred groves, I became convinced, that on this day, the Princess would become a Vestal, and that the Druid, Conra, would convey her to his abode. My conviction became a certainty, when, a few hours after, I deserted my master, and fleeing to the woods, unobserved, sought to cross the river and meet the Christian on his way. For I was told he was coming by a different path than that which led by the groves. As I reached the river the sound of voices fell on my ear. Secreting myself behind a rock, where I could not be perceived, I beheld Conra, with a large train of Druids and attendants, hurrying to the castle. He walked at some distance in front, accompanied by a tall, dark and swarthy Druid. Their tunics were concealed by long, flowing mantles which completely covered them, but I could perceive that each carried a skein. They paused a moment beside where I lay concealed, and in the few words they uttered I caught the names of Sybilla and Mahon mingled, with fierce threats of vengeance against you. As soon as they passed, I made my way with all speed to join the Christians, hoping to find you

among them, for we all knew at the castle that you were one."

"How long ago is this, good Artgal?"

"I have swam the Braid and ran three miles since."

"Think you they have gained the castle?"

"'Tis scarcely probable. A good runner might outstrip them yet."

"Then, Artgal, if he does, and Sybilla is saved from the clutches of that evil Druid, there is nothing in all broad Tir-owen that you may not command!"

"Haste, my Prince. Conra is artful as he is wicked, and has cast his spells over the Princess and her father."

"Let me but see her, and all the Druids in Dalaradia will not wrest her from me!"

"Then go. I am too exhausted to aid you, and to you, every moment is precious."

Bounding through the dense crowd before him, and brushing them aside like dew from heather, he paused not in his eager impetuosity until he reached the side of his giant follower Ibar. His comrades and Owen were walking together, close behind Conall and the Saint, who were discoursing on the journey. Hastily communicating the intelligence, Mahon, followed by his friends, leaped from the path and rushed wildly through the woods.

It is probable, that at any other time the herculean strides of Ibar and Owen would have far out-distanced him; but in the wild excitement of the moment, his feet seemed to keep time to the rapid whirl of his thoughts, and the quick beatings of his heart. Through tangled brushwood and groves of fir; through furze and brush and broom; over rocks and mounds, clearing every impediment in his way, he ran. The thought uppermost in his mind was, that Sybilla was in the Druid's possession and would soon be lost to him for ever.

"On! Comrades, On! Follow me!" he shouted as he went, and the rustling of the branches behind told him they were close in his footsteps. For half an hour without pause or break he pursued his reckless way, until, through a clearing in the trees, the towers of the castle came in sight. He had reached the spot opposite the little grove where Sybilla first

confessed her love, and where he was so abruptly confronted by the Druid. Pausing a moment as he reached the bank, to see if his comrades were following, he turned to Ibar and Owen as they approached and shouted—

“Plunge into the river! It is the nearest way to reach the castle!”

Running down the bank with headlong speed, the three comrades leaped into the river, and in a moment the bold swimmers were battling with the current. They reached the shore in safety, and following the well-known path that led to the principal entrance, soon stood before its portals.

Conra and his Druids were not visible. No human voice fell on their ear, but the piteous whining of the chained hounds in their kennels, and the wild shrieking of the steeds in their stalls, were heard with fearful and startling vividness. The smoke in dark wreaths was bursting from every window in the castle, and forked tongues of flame were leaping and hissing in circles round it. The castle was on fire and from court to turret, the fierce and angry flame extended. Mahon rushed to the gate and found it barred. In his despair at finding no entrance, he wildly shrieked the name of Sybilla. He was answered by a cry from the battlements. Looking up his blood almost froze with horror when he beheld Sybilla and her father, facing the advancing flames, which were now nearing the place on which they stood. Congal and Cathal with their sisters, now appeared and a cry of despair broke from their lips. They had been waiting in one of the gardens of the castle, since their dismissal from their father, hoping that as soon as the Saint appeared, his words would change the obduracy of his heart. But the unexpected and dreadful sight that met their eyes, paralyzed them with fear.

“Sybilla! Sybilla!” cried Mahon in entreating tones, but his voice was drowned in the mocking and derisive laugh of Milcho. Looking down from his airy height, and waving a blazing pine torch over his head he answered—

“Accursed be your God! And thrice accursed thou, ignoble traitor of Tir-owen!”

“There,” cried Sybilla, pointing to the sun, “There is our God; the God of our fathers. O Belus! to thee I come!”

A piercing shriek went up to Heaven from the little group below. In a few moments all would be over. The crackling of the flames increased, and the smoke, now growing denser near the battlements, hid them from sight.

"Let us try the gate again, and with our united strength batter it down!" shouted Mahon wildly, maddened by the sight before him.

Una, Ova and Elie, with bowed heads, and tears streaming down their cheeks, knelt in prayer. Congal and Cathal stood motionless. Feilim and Carbre, who were left behind in the race, reached the spot as Mahon, Ibar and Owen rushed a second time against the gate. Their united efforts failed to shake it, and they might have wasted their strength in useless struggles, had not Carbre come to their aid. A huge beam of oak, which once was destined for a pillar in the banquet hall, but which had been thrown aside, and covered with moss, lay half buried in the grass, at no great distance from the castle. This Carbre perceived, and taking in the situation at a glance, rushed to the spot where it lay. By a violent effort, they raised it from its bed, and summoning all their strength, with one united blow, landed it against the gate. Another followed, and with a crash it came tumbling down, bringing with it, splinters of the oak pillars to which it had been fastened. All this was but the work of a moment. Scarcely two minutes elapsed since Mahon gained the castle, till he and his comrades were rushing up the steps that led to the battlements.

Meantime, the fierce, old pagan, Milcho, looked with gladdened eye and exultant heart on the dark devilry his hand had wrought. He could see in the distance, the advance of Sicur and his Christian host; and looked with scorn upon them. His proud spirit could not brook the teachings of his former slave. He, a king of lordly Dalaradia, to bend in abject homage to a slave and swine-herd! The thought was maddening, and with demon glee he waited for the moment when Sicur would appear, to plunge into the seething and boiling mass of flames that would soon be upon him.

Sybilla, like a Pythoness, proud, grand and beautiful, with her arm extended to the Sun, and her long, dark hair waving around her neck, stood beside her father. She heeded not



the words he spoke, though he ceased not to hurl his maledictions against his advancing foes, but gazed upon the sun-god, and offered up her prayers with firm and undiminished fervor.

"O Bel! the God of Erie and of my fathers, receive thy Vestal. To thee was I dedicated from my youth, and to thee I offer up my life. May the sacrifice avert the evils which threaten Erinn, and may my example be the means of restoring to thee, those misguided and erring men, who have taken to false gods and wandered from thy shrine. Thou art angry with thy people for being led astray; but O! let not the glory of Erie depart. Smite with thy frown, those ignoble serfs approaching, who follow the banner of the foreigner and scoff at thy name. Let not thy idols be trampled in the dust; thy sacred groves desecrated, or our proud banner of the sun-god fall! See! they come to rend thy temples, and trample on thine altars! Their voices can be heard now, even in the sacred groves. And he, who was once the meekest of slaves, is here, *here*, within our sacred precincts! I see him with the evil symbol in his hand! O father!"

"He comes, my daughter. But look! See, where the day-god's beams smile brightest on the grove—there—where the sacred oak extends over rock and river, Conra approaches. He comes to claim you as a Vestal. It is the appointed hour. Thou art a daughter of Bel, and when the altar fires art bright, thou shalt not be forgotten. A thousand virgins shall pray for thee, and thy memory remain green in their hearts. The herd approaches. And now one kiss, one look at Bel, and then for the warrior halls of Heus! Follow me!"

The Christians were now in sight, and could be easily seen from the battlements. St. Patrick, with his burnished staff, upon which the glint of the sunbeams danced, appeared in front, while the mighty multitude behind, joined in a holy hymn which his acolytes were singing. As Milcho embraced Sybilla, he turned to take one look at the day-god; and then, hurling an anathema against the Christians and the Christian's God, shouted the words "Follow me," and plunged headlong, with a shriek into the hissing and roaring flames.

Sybilla, with her hands elevated, and her eyes raised to Heaven, rushed to take the fatal leap; but ere she gained the verge of doom, the strong arms of Mahon encircled her waist; and bearing her in his arms, through smoke and fiery cinders, rushed down the granite stairs, half suffocated, and blinded by smoke, and gained the court and passed through the gate in safety. He had barely time to reach the open air, when Milcho's castle, roof, beam and rafter, fell with a crash. Hurrying with his precious burden through the crowd which now thronged the scene, and commanding none to approach him, he hurriedly made his way to the bank of the river. None followed save Owen, for no clansman dare violate the commands of a prince. Sybilla had swooned. Placing her gently on the bank, he looked on her pale face and believed her dead.

"She has only swooned," said Owen, interpreting the piteous look on his face. "Place her here among the trees, from the gaze of the rude multitude, while I rush down the bank and bring some water to bathe her temples."

She was gently placed in the spot indicated by Owen, and while he descended the bank, Mahon, taking her unyielding hand in his, bent over her and kissed her pale forehead.

"O! Sybilla, my beloved, speak to me! Speak to me, your own Mahon!"

"Die, false traitor and Christian dog!" hissed a deep voice in his ear, and as he raised his head to look who his foe might be, a skein was buried to the hilt in his shoulder. He fell with a groan, but ere his eyes closed, saw the dark form of Conra the Druid, standing over him. Owen soon returned with a cup of water in his hand, and with a cry of agony beheld Mahon insensible and bleeding on the ground.

He was alone. Sybilla was gone!

## CHAPTER XV.

## A MIDNIGHT CONSULTATION IN MAHON'S TENT.

Lonely from my home I come,  
 To cast myself upon your tomb,  
                                     And to weep.  
 Lonely from my lonesome home,  
 My lonesome house of grief and gloom,  
                                     While I keep  
 Vig'il often all night long,  
 For your dear, dear sake.  
 Praying many a prayer so wrong  
 That my heart would break.

—*Mangan.*

Dear my land, I love you dearly, but I'm sick of toil and strife !  
 Dear my friends, 'tis hard to part you, but I'm longing for the life,  
 Far away from crowds and cities, dear my love, I led with thee—  
 With my own, my darling Una, by the mountains and the sea !

—D. F. B.

Fear and consternation took possession of those who had so recently professed the Christian faith. Their superstitious dread of the Druids, returned with startling impressiveness, when they beheld the young Prince of Angher, weltering in his blood. And the sudden and unaccountable disappearance of Sybilla, served to heighten their fears regarding the great and mysterious powers of their order. For a moment they stood irresolute and wavering, vacillating between fear and doubt, and, it is possible, had Conra then been present, his eloquence and subtle arts would have won back many of those, who had so suddenly deserted the old faith and adopted the new. But God had ordained it otherwise. While the men of Dalaradia hesitated; while Christianity and Paganism trembled in the balance; St. Patrick, reading their hearts, and knowing the thoughts that moved them, suddenly burst

through the crowd, and stood beside the prostrate Owen's cry had been heard by those nearest to him. Though unconscious of the cause that gave rise to it, a thrill of horror through the multitude; and believing something dreadful had occurred, they rushed toward from which it emanated. When they saw the young man lying pale and ghastly on the ground, they believed the vengeance of the Gods had overtaken him, and would send a dreadful force, fall upon themselves.

The water which Owen had brought from the well, he sprinkled over Mahon's face. Heaving a deep sigh, he turned his eyes and looked around. His glance fell upon St. Patrick, who then approached. Taking his hand in his, the Saint helped to raise him from the ground, saying:—

"In the name of God, Arise! Blessed are they who believe in his name, and shall continue firm in the faith and fear not!"

Mahon arose. A bright and burning love illumined his bosom, and with a smile, he permitted Owen to draw nectar from the wound. Evidently it had been intended for his throat, but the sudden turning of Mahon's head, had frustrated the Druid's aim. Owen pronounced it only a flesh wound, and applying some herbs to the sore, bandaged it, and muttered a prayer for his speedy recovery.

St. Patrick then addressed them. In glowing tones, high and wonderful eloquence, he told them of the name of the Son of God on earth, his teachings, his labors, his death. He unfolded to them the mysteries and doctrines of the incarnate One; the faith he taught, and all the doctrines of the holy Roman Catholic Church. Silently and with attention they listened. More than an hour was consumed in the discourse, and at its conclusion the vast body of people who followed him, with uncovered heads, knelt to receive his blessing.

Bestowing on them the Papal benediction, which he received from Pope Celestine, in Rome, he dismissed them, and retired to his tent. But the concourse did not disperse. Gathering around his tent they knelt and prayed,

sleep descended on their eyelids, with the stars of the summer night smiling down, they lay upon the mossy sward, among the green woods of Dalaradia.

It was midnight. The soft silver light of the moon beam in beauty upon the Braid. A silence still as death reigned around. The trees were motionless as their own shadow. Milcho's castle cast fitful glares of flame upon the ivy-covered round tower adjoining, and at intervals cast a sickly light upon the tent at its base, wherein the family of Milcho sat. There had been hastily erected for them, and convenient to the was that of Mahon. Conall and Owen sat by his couch. The terrible excitement which he had endured, combined with pains which the hand of Conra had inflicted, had borne heavily on his brain and heart, and wearied and worn, he at length succumbed to sleep. Softly stealing from the tent, Conall with noiseless foot stepped forth in the moonlight. He stepped upon the sleeping thousands scattered over the sward, waiting for the morning bell to summon them to Mass. He blessed his God for such a sweet and edifying sight. Finding on the ground, he poured forth his thanks to Him who had so generously shed the light of his love upon the benighted land of Erin. Tears of joy fell down his cheeks with fervent gratitude he prayed, that the blessings vouchsafed might never depart from her. He was about returning to the tent, when the melancholy tones of a harp fell on his ear, paused and listened. The sounds came from the direct point of the smoking ruins. Advancing, he beheld Fergus with his long, fair hair swayed in disorder around his face, as he touched the strings. He was chanting a dirge for his late master, Milcho. The loneliness and solemnity of the hour, coupled with wailing, death-like dirge which fell in such saddened tones upon the ear, filled his heart with melancholy, and the father whom the Bard bemoaned so feelingly, forced the tears to his eyes, and he wept.

"Such devotion as this," thought Conall, "is worthy of

ward. The allegiance shown by Fergus to the mem Milcho, is but **what** is felt by every follower toward his and but what is **due** by a clansman to his Prince. But when the love of **God** has entered their hearts, and the **ees**, like themselves are Christian, how grand and **bles** be this land, and how bright and dazlingly the fait burn and endure ! I see before me lofty domes arise, w cross pointing to **Heaven** ; and from end to end of t the incense from **a** thousand altars floats while the harp Bard will be heard in palace and hut, sounding the gl the ever living **and** true God. Blessed be His name, fo derful is the **change** His hand has wrought in Erinn ! ”

Fergus ceased his song of sorrow. Bowing his head breast and shading his eyes with his hand he remained few moments in **that** position, motionless. Conall appr and gently taking his hand in his, led him away fr spot. As they reached the tent of Mahon, they were Congal. Entering, they found the young Prince still and Owen watching by his bed. Congal's features be the grief that sat brooding on his heart. The fearful of his father, and the uncertainty of the fate of weighed heavily upon him. He could not sleep, and i to divert the current of his thoughts, and obtain a b spite from them, in listening to the holy conversation of and Owen, had come thither. Fergus, whose own grief was great to bear, assumed a more cheerful bea the presence of his Prince. Whether assumed or not, the effect of rousing him from his stupor, and remindi that he had to live and act for a noble purpose, name promulgation of the faith and the happiness of the who owed, to him, allegiance.

“ My hair was blanchd with silver, Congal, ere th born ; I have played with thy father when a boy, and the deer in the woods of Dalaradia and Tir-Owen ; him, for I was his companion in youth, and his high when he assumed the wand of chieftaincy. I followd all his wars, and in peace sat at his banquet board. his trusted friend, and well he loved me. But he is g

has pleased our God that he should perish violently, and his sins lie between his Creator and himself. But Congal, Sybilla, and your sisters still live. Time will appease their grief, but meanwhile it is your duty to guide and direct them aright and endeavor to alleviate their great sorrow."

"Fergus is right," replied Conall; "your grief is shared all, and since we cannot undo the past let us strive for the present, for our temporal, as well as our spiritual welfare. go with the holy Patricius on the morrow; I follow whith so-ever he leads. It pleases him that I should be an humble disciple, and I willingly obey. But ere I depart, it would please me well to know what your intentions are regard Sybilla."

"I shall be guided by Patricius in all matters; but by my will I would march my followers into the very heart of the Druids' groves and wrest her even from their altars."

"Remember the Ard Riagh is still a pagan, and the Druids are under his protection. None dare violate the law. Sybilla must be saved at all hazards."

"Were Mahon strong again, I would not fear with him to undertake the task."

"His wound is but trifling, to-morrow he will probably turn to Tir-owen, to his dying father. But where does he mean to reside Congal?"

"I've been thinking of leaving Dalaradia for a time sojourning with our brothers in the colony, we have placed so near the Britons."

"What!" exclaimed Fergus, starting to his feet, "Woe! leave the pleasant glens and valleys of green Dalaradia the bleak and sterile hills of Alba?"

\* "The Scots were of Irish origin, for, to the great confusion of the inhabitants of Ireland, those at least, of the conquering and predominate caste, were called Scots. A colony of these Irish Scots distinguished by the name of Dalriada, or Dalreudini, natives of Ulster, had early attained a settlement on the coast of Argyleshire. They finally established there, under Fergus, the son of Eric, about the year 503, and recruited colonies from Ulster, continued to multiply and increase until they formed a nation which occupied the western side of Scotland," &c.—*Sir Walter Scott's History of Scotland.*

—BRUCE.

"Hibernia is the proper fatherland of the Scots."

"It is but for a time, good Fergus. My father's fate heavy on my heart, and I would fain forget it."

"In my youth I have been among the barbarians, and visited their land. What arts they possess, they debted to us for, and what good they know, it has be to give; but their mountains are bleak and barren, would be a poor exchange, even the most fruitful of the rudest in Dalaradia."

"It would be well to carry the gospel there," said "but Erie is not yet free; and, until she is entirely purged of Paganism, our own land requires her sons. Your presence and example here, might, probably, do more for the people than an army in Alba. Besides, you surely would not go without Sybilla."

"No. I meant that she should accompany me, as her sisters; but, since you object, I will hearken to your advice, and remain in Erinn. I shall repair to Kileurran. Its memories are not so sorrowful as those of Braid, and I shall there devote myself to my religion and country."

"It is a good resolve, my Prince, and though my strength is growing feeble, it can still strike the strings in the harp of Kileurran; and, praised be God! not as it was wont to do in honor of war and blood, but to the honor and glory of the blessed Lord."

"Your fervor for the new faith is pleasing to me, and shows the sincerity of your heart. And I tell you that the halls of Kileurran shall yet ring with the voice of the harp, and Prince Congal raise altars in his principality, and shall endure through the coming centuries. Aye, aye, the songs of the bards shall go down to posterity, and be remembered when the hearts that uttered them are cold. Erinn will be bright in the future, and a brighter ray of glory encircle her brow than, even now, beams upon her. She has been free in the past, when the foot of the Roman was planted on the

\* "There are the remains of a large rath, of cyclopean construction, in the townland of Killycarn, parish of Bruery, and barony of Lower Lifford, which is said to have been one of the residences of Milcho."

—Ousick's Life of St.



of almost all mankind, but never so free as now. To-day the Roman fears to cross the narrow sea that divides us.\* I know our hearts are bold, and our arms are strong. If they will be bolder and stronger, when girt with Christian armor, and marshaled under the Christian banner of the Cross. Our God has shed his light upon Erin, and his princes and people have found favor in his sight. If his princes are true to the trust confided unto them, how grand and glorious will be the result! And O! Prince Congal, think, think of what you can accomplish in Dalaradia!"

"I shall do my utmost, Conall, for thou hast persuaded me to remain, and I shall endeavor to imitate thee in humility and Christian virtues."

"Do not imitate me, I am an unworthy model to copy; imitate the great Apostle who is among us."

"I shall labor among my people, and hold a loving rivalry with Prince Mahon, for well I know he will do good in my own town."

"He is a noble youth, and well fitted for the proud position for which God has ordained him. He is beloved by the people, Patricius; and a blessing has descended on his house."

see! he stirs, and seems troubled by some fearful scene of burning was restless and uneasy. The dreadful scene of Sybilla about to plunge into the fire. Raising himself in bed if to rush to her rescue, he shouted, "Sybilla! Sybilla!" by his side, and administered a cooling draught to his parched lips.

"Poor youth," muttered Conall, "he has his own sorrow too. But let us pray that he may rise refreshed and invigorated, and renewed with a brighter hope, on the morrow, and that she for whom he sighs may be restored, and given the blessed light which has dawned on us."

"Amen," fervently responded Congal and Fergus.

"And now, as it is late," continued Conall, as he rose

\* The Romans under Agricola, were in England in the year 43, the year St. Patrick began to preach the gospel in Ireland.

depart, "let us pray, for mine eyes feel weary, and I must snatch some brief repose before the bell rings for early Mass."

With his two companions he knelt on the sod; and, after his devotions, wrapped his mantle around him, and sought repose.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## CONGAL INVADES THE SACRED GROVES.

The sound  
city,

As of the assault of an imperial  
The hiss of inextinguishable fire,  
The roar of men; the earthquaking  
Fall of vast bastions and precipitous towers,  
The clash of wheels and clang of armed hoofs,  
The clash of brazen mail, as of the wreck  
Of adamantine mountains; the mad blast  
Of trumpets and the neigh of raging steeds,  
And shrieks of women whose thrill jars the blood.  
—Hellas.

Scarcely had the first beams of the sun lighted up the darkness on Slieve-mis, when the Saint's bell summoned the weary sleepers to Mass. Lights were soon gleaming in the tents, and from every tree, and rock, and bush, thousands arose and wended their way to the little knoll upon which the Saint was offering up the holy sacrifice. The Mass being concluded, he spent an hour in exhorting his hearers to remain faithful to the creed they professed, promising them to leave among them, priests who would guide and direct a church, on that very day, to the Most High, on the site of Milcho's castle, on the very ruins of paganism. And thousands of voices responded in the affirmative. Another hour was spent in baptizing those who had not, as yet, been touched by the waters of regeneration. This being done, the Saint, taking with him Conall and a few of his chosen followers, again entered his tent. There he explained to them his intention of proceeding through Ulster, until he had converted all the inhabitants. Conall should remain behind in Dalaradia, to complete the good work which had been begun, and at Beal-

tinne,\* meet him at Tara. Conall broached to the Saint, the idea of rescuing Sybilla from the groves, and was advised to use all legitimate means at his disposal to effect that object but was reminded that no blood should be shed, nor violence used. Congal himself, might claim her, and, as her brother and Prince of Dalaradia, had a right to demand her from the Druids. Did Conra object, Congal could appeal to the Ard Riagh. The prince was then summoned to the tent, and received from Patrick his blessing.

As the moment for departure came, the Saint stepped forth from his tent, and raising the Cross in his hand, dispensed his blessing to the assembled thousands. Raising a holy hymn on the morning air, he and his followers resumed their journey. As they passed by the ruins of the castle they beheld a large body of men engaged in clearing away the rubbish. Cathal and Owen were directing the operations, and with their own hands were removing the beams of timber which had fallen.

"They are already fulfilling their promise to you," observed Conall, who had come thus far with the Saint, "and will soon erect a church to Him who has so miraculously shed His light upon them."

"Blessed be our God!" exclaimed St. Patrick, astonished at the ardor of the Dalaradians. "What a glorious people! The light of God has truly penetrated their souls, and the Truth which took centuries to bend the stubborn Roman, has here taken root, and been consummated in a day. Knee down, my friends, and receive from me a blessing which shall never depart from you."

The multitude knelt on the green sod, leaving St. Patrick standing alone. Uplifting his hands to heaven, he blessed them, their mountains, their vales and rivers, their flocks their herds and their stores. He prayed that a blessing might descend from heaven, as the first rays of the sun crimsoned their hills, and at eventide, and through the hours of the

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\* May. On which a great pagan festival was held, when all the fires were extinguished.

darkness it would continue with them. He prophesied that green Ulster would be famous for her Christian bards and heroes, and that, through the coming centuries, the faith would remain triumphant. That persecution should not conquer it; that earth or hell should not efface it; and, despite the power of kingly heretic or apostate, it would remain, bright, glorious, triumphant!

How the words spoken by St. Patrick in the valley of Dalaradia, fourteen hundred years ago, have been fulfilled, let history attest. The savage Scandinavian, in his thousand galleys, burst upon their shores, and set up his idols of Thor and Woden. After a fierce struggle of three hundred years, they drove him from their plains, and reinstated, in all its grandeur and beauty, the Cross on their shrines. They sent Columba with the light of faith, to their kindred, the neighboring Scots, and gave to Britain learning, both human and divine. The Norman, a more insidious foe, with hypocritical heart and tyrannous hand, failed to subdue them. The female demon, Elizabeth, the scourge of the Church of God, could neither, by her arts or arms, eradicate or efface the seed planted in their hearts by Patrick. It grew and fructified. It flourished amid persecution, and expanded amidst blood. And to-day it lives and burns ineffaceable and inextinguishable.

The Saint departed, leaving behind many a happy heart, and many a joyous soul. Conall immediately summoned Cathal and Congal to Mahon's tent. The young chief had just awoke from a long sleep, and seemed easy and refreshed. His first thought was of St. Patrick, his next of Sybilla. "The Saint has departed," answered Conall, "but though you did not see him, he as not forgotten you. Here is a crucifix which he sent you. And as for Sybilla, it is of her we wish to speak, and form some plan to effect her rescue from Conra."

"What said the Saint regarding her?" questioned Congal. "He said as her brother, and Prince of Dalaradia, you had a right to demand her."

"Then I will demand her, and this very day, too, at the head of my followers"

"But **be not violent, good Congal. Would it not be better that you and Cathal should proceed alone, than at the head of a band of armed men?**"

"**What?** and leave ourselves to the mercy of the angry Druids! Know you not, good Conall, that they consider the groves **profaned** by the presence of one who is not of the order? Even a prince is forbidden to enter their sacred precincts. Tortured as Conra is by sorrow, anger, and despair he would not hesitate to sacrifice us to his fierce passion. But were **Mahon** able to accompany me, I would rescue Sibilla, though I were forced to penetrate to the most secret recesses of their idolatrous stronghold. As it is, I shall immediately summon my brave warriors, and with Owen, Iba Felim and Carbre, beard the old Druid in his den."

"Would to God I could accompany you," said Mahon with a sigh, looking at his bandaged arm. "But though be not there, my soul will be with you, and I will pray for your success and speedy return."

"Our success is certain, Mahon. Fear not that the Druids shall encompass us with their spells. Armed with the Cross and the **faith** that is in us, we shall meet them, in the groves, and triumph over them."

"God grant you may, Congal, and with Him to aid you think not of failure."

"Some one approaches," said Cathal, drawing the curtain of the tent aside. "It is my sisters. Welcome Una, Elie and Ova!"

The maidens bashfully entered the tent. Traces of recent suffering were visible on their faces. They were pale, but looked, in their sorrow, more beautiful than when the glow of the roses was tinted on their cheeks. After being saluted by their brothers and Conall, they approached the couch. Mahon, and tenderly taking his hand inquired after his welfare. Being seated, Congal explained to them his determination of entering the sacred groves and rescuing their sisters. They were delighted at the news and doubted not that it would be successful in his enterprise.

"But," said Una, and a shudder passed through her frame

as she spoke, "I fear Conra, the Druid. This morning, while listening to Patricius, and while my soul was melted to tears by his impassioned words, I saw Conra with a scowl on his face, glaring at the apostle. His looks portended evil. I fear me he bodes no good to us."

"But, art sure, Una, that it was the Druid?"

"I could not be mistaken, Congal, I have met him too often not to recognize him. Ova and Elie also knew him."

The sisters corroborated Una's words. After a pause Congal spoke.

"I doubt not but he was here. He is as well skilled in hypocrisy as he is in the mysteries of his creed. And 'tis well he has been here. He has seen, with his own eyes, the overthrow of his idols; and perhaps his heart has been touched by the eloquence of the Saint."

"I doubt it much," returned Mahon, with an incredulous smile.

"Had you seen his frowning face," said Una, "when Patricius pronounced his anathema on the idols of Bel, you would not think so."

"No, Conra, like my poor father," said Congal, "is too stubborn of heart to listen to anything defamatory of the ancient creed of Erinn. Prayers cannot move his soul. He is so wrapped up in his own faith that even a miracle cannot change him. Know you not that he aspires to be the Arch-Druid of Erinn?"

"His ambition is boundless as his patriotism," returned Mahon, "and 'tis pity that one so gifted as he should be lost to the fold of Christ."

"God, in his own good time, will bring it about," said Congal, "and in the meantime, while Congal is intent on his purpose, let us go forth and confront this Druid. I mean to accompany you. And while we are absent, let Fergus come hither with his harp, and with Mahon and Una and your sisters, pray for the accomplishment of our design."

"I shall immediately call the clansmen to arms, and summon Fergus to the tent," said Congal, as he proceeded on his mission.

Soon afterwards the sound of a horn reverberated through the quiet valley. The men who were engaged in removing the debris of Milcho's dwelling, knowing well the portent the sound, soon gathered around their chief. He explained to them the object of his call, and with a cheer, they grasp their arms, and with Congal and Cathal at their head, departed for the sacred groves.

But one short week ago and they would have deemed the visitation a sacrilege; but now, so full were their hearts with the true faith that they were ready for any emergency, chance that would lead them to break the idols of Braid. Armed with their long lances and broad shields, their shining helmets glittering in the morning light, they presented a grand and noble sight as they stepped forth to invade the stronghold of the gods.

Adown the green banks of the Braid, on the very path which Milcho pursued at midnight to meet Conra in the groves, past the Cromleach, the rathis and round towers, the rocks, ruins and waterfalls which he had met in his course, they bent their way. Three hours were consumed in the progress, at the expiration of which time they approached the first gate that led to the abode of the Druids. It was guarded by a sentinel. Before opening the wicket, he demanded of Prince Congal who it was who claimed admission. No sooner had he mentioned his name and errand than the wicket was violently shut, and a wild cry burst from the porter. Three hundred armed men stood before him. His cry was echoed by a hundred voices. The trampling of feet was heard, and a wild and fearful cry resounded through the groves. The screams of women and the husky shouts of men added terror to the din within. It seemed as if all the devils had broke loose and mingled their shouts to swell the pandemonium. All of a sudden it ceased, and for a few moments a dreadful silence reigned.

"Break in the doors, my men!" shouted Congal, rushing with all his strength against the barrier that impeded his progress. His efforts were vain. Ibar, the giant, and a few of his comrades assailed it with the same result. Suddenly



wicket was again opened, and the voice of Congal heard:—

“Impious invaders of the holy places, beware! and tell the Christian dog, Patricius, that your sister is dead, and that on him and you shall descend the vengeance of Belus! You have been false to your god, but before we desecrate his shrines, we shall give them to fire and Enter and meet with the vengeance of your outraged clansmen!” shouted Congal

ferociously, rushing again toward the door. Ibar and his followers obeyed. The door was sundered from its hinges. Rushing in they beheld before them an enormous statue of Bel.

“Break it down, and scatter their idol in the dust,” shouted Owen, snatching a spear from one of the soldiers and striking the god. But a moment sufficed to tumble him from his lofty pedestal. Broken and trampled he lay scattered on the ground.

“Follow me!” said Congal, leaping in the direction which he supposed led to their sanctuary. But he had not gone many paces when a dark smoke burdened the air. Arrows of flame shot up into the element, and the sky became crimsoned with lurid light. The sanctuaries were on fire. The groves were one mass of flame, and far as the eye could reach in the direction of the Druid’s temples, nought but a fearful conflagration met the gaze. It was impossible to proceed further. The flames were fiercely and steadily advancing. Even now the soldiers could feel the warm glow of fire, borne on the breeze, burning their brows. To advance was impossible, and with saddened heart Congal gave the order to retreat. Falling back, the men took their station on a rising knoll overlooking the Braid. From their position they could plainly see the advancing flames. Almost stupefied with terror, they beheld the rush of the angry fire. Temples, towers and altars crumbled before it. In its devastating march, the giant oaks of the forest fell, and the shrines that had stood for ages mouldered into dust. Borne on the wings of the wind the shrieks and lamentations of men and women could

be heard. It was a fearful sight, and froze with terror the soldiers of Congal.

"This is dreadful!" exclaimed Conall as he pressed to the side of Congal. "Never have I beheld so fearful a sight before. The old heathen has destroyed his temples and his gods sooner than have his groves invaded by a Christian."

"You cannot bend his stubborn heart, Conall, but little I reckon of him if I only knew Sybilla was safe."

"Do not fear for her, Congal. Not a hair of her head has fallen. She is safe, and now on her way to Tara to join the College of Sacred Virgins."

"Think you so, Conall?"

"I do. Conra will present her before the Ard-Riagh, who you know, is still a pagan, and under his auspices gain protection for her in the Sacred College. I am pledged to meet Patricius at Bealtinne time at Tara, and who knows but we shall meet Sybilla there. Trust me, she is safe. Let us return and convey the news to your sisters and Mahon."

"You speak well, Conall. While my sisters remain near the ruins of the home where they have for years been happy it will only add another pang to their melancholy."

"Ova and Elie have determined to become the brides of Christ, and your brother Cathal wishes to be a priest. Patrick has given his approbation, and wishes them and you to accompany me to Tara."

"Willingly shall I go, and with pride and pleasure look on the overthrow of the pagan gods of Erin."

"We'll meet Sybilla there. The prayers of the Christians must prevail, and she will return with you and Mahon redeemed and purified. Return you with your sisters to Kilcurran on the morrow; Mahon, as soon as he is able, must return to Tir-owen, and in the meantime, I shall wait to see you

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\* Amongst the ancient institutions of Tara, was a sort of College of Sacred Virgins, whose vocation it appears to have been, like the Dryads or fortune tellers among the Greeks, to divine the future, for the indulgence of the superstitious or the credulous. The place where these holy Druidesses resided bore the name "Retreat Until Death."

first church in Dalaradia completed. I shall visit you, v Owen, in your castle. Bratha will bring me intelligence the Saint, and the hour to set forth to meet him. Let us turn and comfort those who are eagerly awaiting us. Th what fearful thoughts fill the souls of Malon and your sis while we are absent."

"I would fain look longer upon the blessed fire that consumes the idols of the Druid, Conall, but you touch a chord my heart, and I feel it my duty to return."

Winding his horn, he descended from the knoll and stood in the midst of his clansmen. As they assembled around him he took his position at their head and slowly returned to the valley of Dalaradia.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## CONGAL AND UNA.

Earth now is green, and heaven is blue,  
 Lovely spring, which makes all new,  
 Lovely spring doth enter;  
 Sweet young sunbeam do subdue  
 Angry, aged winter.

Blasts are mild and seas are calm,  
 Every meadow flows with balm,  
 The earth wears all her riches:  
 Harmonious birds sing such a psalm  
 As ear and heart bewitches.

—*Sir John Davies.*

It was the month of May, sweet, pleasant May, with its buds and blossoms, its daisies and roses. The trees were clothed in their emerald sheen; the woods rejoiced in the jocund song of the birds; and the streams murmured a merry strain as they sped on their bounding course to the ocean. The icy fetters of winter that bound the brooks and chained them in an ignoble thralldom, were dissolved; the mountain moss and heather that lay hidden for months under the cold and tyrannous snow had melted away before the sun's warm breath; and mountain, forest, brook and river rejoiced in freedom. The sun shone in unclouded splendor on Dalarnia; his beams tinged with a golden glory the wooded mountain peaks, and the fertile plains that lay in dreary calmness around the towers of Kilcurran.

It is evening. The twilight is sinking into darkness. The tall trees are casting their shadows athwart the paths that lead from the castle of Kilcurran to the adjacent woods. All is peaceful and still. The birds have ceased their song, and nought breaks on the ear to disturb the solitude save the murmur of the Red river as it speeds swiftly past the castle.

At the base of a mossy rock which rises on its banks, over-shadowed by huge oaks which rise perpendicularly over it, are seated two figures, whose lineaments we can still distinguish in the fading twilight. One is a youth, tall in stature, and of noble and distinguished aspect. There is a trace of sorrow on his handsome face, and his dark eyes, as he bends over his companion and whispers in her ear, have a tinge of melancholy made more apparent by the paleness of his features. His mantle of many colors, folded loosely about him, and the green plume in his military cap bespeak him a chief of high rank. He is Congal, the son of Milcho, and the new chief of Dalaradia.

His companion, who nestles so lovingly by his side and looks confidingly into his face, is one who, for beauty and goodness is, perhaps, unequalled in all green Emania. She is Una, the betrothed of Congal.

"I know not, Una," said Congal, in answer to a question of hers regarding Sybilla, as they seated themselves on the mossy sward after a long walk through the wood. "I know not, Una, whether it were the promptings of the evil one or the teachings of Conra that influenced Sybilla to act such a stubborn part. But I do know that she inherits my father's noble and unyielding spirit, along with her mother's beauty. And many a time you and I have seen her on the Braid, when its waves were lashed to fury by the tempest that swept down from the hills, and we feared our little curragh would be engulfed, when we imagined the gods braving the wrath of she has taken the helm and laughingly We believed in the *Manannan*,\* brought us safely ashore. and I have often wondered how she, a predestined Vestal, could so unflinchingly brave their fury and their wrath. To me, her brother, she has ever been an enigma. I love her, Una, with all the intensity of a brother's love, and it grieves my soul to think that she, the best beloved of our house, should still remain a pagan. But as I have said, she inherits my father's proud spirit. She

\* The god of the wind.

loves her native land, and is afraid that Patrick's teachings will alienate the children of Erin from a love of liberty and make them debased and enslaved. But you, who have felt the influence of the Christian's teachings as I have, believe differently. Could I only get Sybilla to embrace the true faith, despite the sorrows and misfortunes I have borne, I would be happy."

"So would I, Congal, and the hour that made her a Christian and a child of God would be the happiest hour of my life."

"Let us hope for the best, Una; the darkest hour is always before dawn. We know not what a day may bring forth. If Sybilla once meets Patricius, I believe her proud heart will be softened. But I know not why she should hate Mahon so!"

"Hate Mahon, Congal?"

"Yes, she hates him with all the intensity of her nature."

"She loves him, Congal, with all the intense feelings of her warm heart," replied Una, struggling against the overpowering rush of early recollections which thronged upon her. "Do you remember the night we met in the grove by the Braid's side?"

"I do. On that night you confessed your love to me."

"Well, on that night Mahon and Sybilla met, and she confessed her love for him. And were it not that Conra interposed, she, to-day, might be a Christian and the bride of Mahon."

"Was Mahon then a Christian?"

"No. But she believed him such, and her convictions were confirmed by the words of the Druid. Conra called him traitor, false to his gods and to Erin, and though Sybilla loved him, her proud heart would not bend to listen to the vindication of one whom a Druid had said to be false."

"And think you, Una, that Mahon loves Sybilla with as fond a love as I bear to you?"

"Yes, Congal, as true and lasting as ever man's love for woman."

"Then Mahon, brother of my soul, I pity thee!"

"Why, Congal?"

"Because her heart is stubborn short of a miracle can change it."

"Have we not seen miracles Sicur was among us?"

"Yes, but he could not change."

"She did not hear him. Le father and Conra, she listened advice. You know, she was destined. She had read the books of destiny become a member of the Sisterhood young chief of Tir-owen, Mahon. to him, and his image illuminated them in their hour of love, and alienated her heart from Mahon committed a crime in loving him, rifice to the gods, and endeavored That she was saved from such bravery of Mahon. Knowing he cannot but think that Sybilla will

"O! Una, my beloved, thy woe soul, and I would give the proudest Dalaradia to see them consummate

"Congal, Sybilla is the pearl the brightest gem in Emania."

"And pity 'tis, dear Una, that

"She is not so obstinate that, Congal, with a band of followers against Sicur, and you know the scoffer and came back a Christ billa, when she meets him. Sure ings of the great Apostle, her kindness and love will succumb love. I, who have been more than braced the faith. Her brothers under its influence, and have forg their pagan fathers. And when Elie, under the tuition of Conall

vestals, not of Bel but of Christ, surely, Congal, she will melt and become one of us."

"O! Una, could your aspirations and longings be realized, how happy would Congal feel on the morning he led you to the altar as his bride."

"Congal, were Sybilla released from the custody of the Druids, and free to think for herself between Christianity and Paganism, I doubt not but she would embrace our creed. But have you done your duty toward her as a brother? Have you claimed the intercession of the Ard-Riagh?"

"I have. Fergus departed for Tara on the day we left the banks of the Braid to come to Kilcurran. I have not heard from him since, and it is time he were here. A clansman of Tir-owen, as in duty bound, brought me intelligence of the death of the old chief, my father's comrade. Mahon is now the chief of his tribe, but has not been inaugurated yet. He is waiting for Patricius to put the wand of chieftaincy into his hand, on the rath of Tullough-oge. On that day, Una, when Mahon, the first Christian prince that has ever swayed the sceptre of Tir-owen, is made chief, I wish, at Tullough-oge, to claim you as my bride, with Patricius the officiating priest, and Mahon, my brother, by my side."

"And on that day, Congal, I hope Sybilla will be the bride of Mahon."

"Freely from my heart I wish it, Una; and hope that your words may prove prophetic."

"I know they will. Something within my heart tells me so. But hark! Some one approaches!"

A rustling among the leaves was heard; the branches were swept aside, and emerging from the gloom, a man appeared who, perceiving Congal, saluted, and with bowed head stood before him.

"Welcome, Bratha!" exclaimed Congal, as he recognized the ambassador of Conall. "What news do you bring from the banks of the Braid?"

"Good news, Prince Congal! Conall has instructed me to deliver to you the intelligence that the good Patricius is advancing on Tara, and he summons you and your followers to



be present to witness the approaching. He tarried Prince Mahon, and met again about an hour ago. But as I than he, I was sent forward to will soon be here."

"And what of Conall and you to hear Mass in the church father's castle, and afterward Prince Mahon, and from thence

"Then never did Druid, at meeker homage to his gods, Brat Patricius, the ambassadors of Chu

"It will please Conall well to Congal, and Patricius expects to n

"I will meet him there, not only of the faith in me, but also to only thrall in which the Druids have rescu

"You will be aided by Mahon and you start for Tara, you will have a Riagh ever had. Meanwhile, Conall expects you to meet him near the ready. He is the only one in Tir-ew of three of his followers, that has ex His clansmen have almost repudiated hestands firm. They say that Sicur ha and that the Druids will dissipate it at believes that Sicur will overcome their to accompany him. Such is, in brief, ti gal, I bring you."

"It is good, Bratha. I would not be when Patricius and the Druids meet for a of Nial. Methinks the Convention this y orable one. Truly, it will be so to me, if lost sister."

"I doubt not, Congal," said Una, "of ti hears the Apostle. Harder hearts have be

how I long to meet her at Tara, and under the shelter of the Cross!"

"That your sanguine anticipations may be speedily realized, my beloved Una, I shall pray. But Fergus must be near at hand. Let us meet and welcome him home."

Followed at a respectful distance by Bratha, they slowly sauntered in the direction of his coming. Soon his voice was heard chanting a hymn of praise to God, in sweet and impassioned language. It fell upon their ears in tones of dulcet melody, and found a response in their souls. As he came in sight, they rushed forward to meet him, and saluted him with all the tenderness of loving children. Giving his harp to Bratha, Congal and Una taking his arm, supported the aged Bard to the castle gate. Cathal, Elie and Ova, who were watching on the battlements for his coming, rushed down to embrace and welcome him. And thus accompanied by his noble friends, he was ushered into the banquet hall.

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In me, communion with this purest being,  
Kindled intenser zeal, and made me wise  
In knowledge, which in hers mine own mind seeing,  
Left in the human world few mysteries:  
How without fear of evil or disguise  
Was Cythna!—what a spirit strong and mild,  
Which death, or pain, or peril, could despise,  
Yet melt in tenderness!—what genius wild,  
Yet mighty, was enclosed within one simple child!  
—*The Revolt of Islam.*

“The harp that once through Tara’s halls” poured a flood  
of melody, and kindled and kept alive in the hearts of the  
sons and daughters of Erin, a grand and heroic patriotism,  
has been chilled by Saxon perfidy and Saxon hate. But  
though its glories have departed, and the halls wherein it was  
enthroned have crumbled before time, tempest and war, the  
memories of its olden splendor and former glory remain, and  
are cherished in the warm core of every Irish heart.

#### THE DAYS ARE GONE.

##### L

The days are gone when Erin’s harp  
Swelled high in bower and hall,  
When mail-clad warriors girded on  
The sword at Erin’s call.  
When kings and tyrants quailed to hear  
The war-cry of the Gael,  
And Freedom’s banner proudly waved  
Throughout green Innisfail!

##### II.

Hushed is the harp, and silent now  
The strains that once were poured  
In streams of gushing melody

Around the kingly heart.  
 Silent and cold in death they lie  
 Who sung green Erin's name,  
 Her glory and her chivalry,  
 And proud enduring fame.

## III.

The foeman's hand has dimmed the light  
 That once so brightly shone;  
 And Bard and Minstrel sing in vain  
 Of glories past and gone.  
 But hope still cheers the patriot's heart,  
 Though bound in slavery's chain,  
 And Freedom yet shall strike the harp  
 In Erin's Isle again!

In the days of the Ard-Riagh Laegari, Ireland was at the topmost pinnacle of fame and glory. She was free and independent from where the white-capped breakers of Cape Clear, dash on her southern coast and fringe her sunny shores with silver spray, to where the fierce scream of the northern eagle bade defiance to the storm, on the mountains of Mourne, or the ocean-washed Head of Malin. Her war-ships lined the coasts, numerous as the sea-gulls that fluttered round their masts, keeping watch and ward for sight of sail or glint of spear of coming foe. Her chariotceers and horsemen, led by kings and chiefs, outrivalled Rome in number and splendor; and to such perfection had military science grown, that a bugle-blast from Tara could summon the defenders of the Sunburst around their Ard-Riagh in a day. No wonder the Roman\* paused on the shores of conquered Britain; and, though he looked with longing eye on the green mountains and fair valleys of Erin, where his eagle never soared, feared to test his strength in the rude reception, which he well knew her sons would give him!

The residence of the Ard-Riagh was in the palace of Tara, in Meath. Where now the hovel or cabin stands, the fruits of English civilization (?) a city, with palaces, domes and spires then proudly lay, covering thousands of acres in its broad proportions. It was the seat of learning, art and

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\* Agricola, at the time of St. Patrick's landing, was in Britain.

science. These were fostered by the kings under their protecting banners, flourished to modern days. From never equalled, in has been imitated, but the palace was and ennobling scene where the blend into one could discern within was presented to the water and the Boyne, before the horizon, the Cavan to the far north, with the royal hill of the foreground; the wooded heights of Slane and the four ancient roads, which led away to provinces, like the reins of empire laid loosely on apartments, and its grand banquet hall, five hundred length, was, probably, the most magnificent in the world. It was decorated with all the splendour could lavish on it. The grand monarch, Laegaire, his royal race and dignity, was a patron of every science that was instructive, and its ennobling His gorgeous in the extreme, and its grandeur and majesty were only paralleled by his own noble heart, and hospitality.

It was ordained that it was obligatory on every that ruled over Ireland, to keep in constant attendance his person, ten officers, who were scarcely ever to presence. These were a prince, or chief of noble

\* *Tailltean*, *Taillte* or *Tailltin*, now known as Teltown, lying between Kells and Navan, in the County of Meath. This was royal residences of the head kings of Ireland. A celebrated annual festival was held here from time immemorial. It is said to have been instituted by the last of our native kings. It is said to have been instituted by the long-handed, a Dedanann king, and called after his foster-mother, continued for a fortnight before and a fortnight after the 1st of which is said to have received its Irish name *La Lughnasa* (pr. Law Our legends inform us that athletic games similar to the Olympic of were a prominent feature of the ceremonies of the Fair of *Tailltin*. traces of forts and artificial lakes can still be seen there, and also a sion called *Lag an Aenagh*, i. e. the "Hollow of the Fair," where many were wont to be solemnized by the Druids.

† Magee's Popular History of Ireland.

chiefs, and, tent which recent and e, a grand The eye the Black-he hills of ailtean\* in d Skreen, d the four air necks.† thousand feet in dence in that art became art and irt was ificence oundless

monarch upon we have his good, a

way be of the fair and omeric, aid the It August, (onasa) oned. The pres sage

brehon, a Druid, a physician, a bard, a historian, a musician, and three stewards. The prince was the companion and champion of the king; the office of the brehon was to explain the laws and customs of the country before the king; the Druid's office was to offer sacrifices, and to draw omens and auguries, by means of his science and heathen arts; the physician's duty was to perform cures for his king, and queen, and the royal household; the bard was maintained for the purpose of praising, or of satirizing every one, according to his good or evil deeds; it was the historian's office to record and preserve the genealogies, histories and adventures of the nobles, from time to time; the musician's office was to play upon the harp, and to chant poems and songs before the king; and the three stewards had to wait upon the king, and supply his personal wants, for which purpose they had a numerous train of cup-bearers, butlers, and other servitors, under their orders.\*

Right royally did Laegari hold sway in Erin, and, as a ruler, was beloved by his subjects, and obeyed more faithfully, than many of his more warlike predecessors.

The *Féis Temhrach*, or Convention of Tara, was a great general assembly, somewhat like a parliament, to which the nobles and ollahms of Ireland were wont to repair every third year, about the time of the Feast of Bealtinne, in May, when all the fires were extinguished. Its object was to renew and establish laws and regulations, and to give their sanction to the annals and historic records of Ireland. One of the religious ceremonies employed by the Druids of this convention, to heighten the solemnity of the occasion, was to order all the fires to be quenched, in order to re-kindle them instantaneously from a sacred fire dedicated to the honor of their god. At it, an especial seat was assigned to each of the Irish nobility, according to his rank and title. There was also given a seat to each of the chieftains of the bands of warriors who were retained in the service of the king and lords of Ireland.

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\* Keating's Ireland.

This assembly had met for centuries, grace, genius and beauty of the Island. B magnificence displayed before, by monarch sion of its assembling in the year of gra being Bealtinne-time, it was also the Ard- Gay garlands of roses and evergreens fest dwellings, and from the road called "The S iots," to the Banquet Hall, hundreds of h were stationed, who made unceasing music

It was the first day of the feast, and the human beings crowded every available space thronged with other thousands hurrying to t thronged around the Banquet Hall; they King's Rath, and the House of Cormac; an of Queen Mab to the House of Hostages and swelling throng pressed, gay in their tume, and with flaunting flags and banners.

While the king was entertaining his not the great hall, and his harpers chanting his sound of the warriors' bronze spears, beating kept measure to the melody of the harp when music and merriment were at their l Druids silently left the Temple of Sacrifice knoll adjoining the Banquet Hall, and hurried the "Slope of the Chariots."

The crowd them, bowing as they passed, and, turning in a large and stately building, half hid among proceeded thither. It was rather a series of one whole. The principal one stood in the by two others of less stately proportions, and inferior in size to the main one, exceeded in others. The longest of the group was the Sacred Virgins of Tara, and the next in size tion where the Vestals, designed for the Sis their novitiate, previous to being admitted to j

As the Druids approached the first gate t entrance, the eldest pause d, and seating himself graved with Ogram characters, said, address panion:

"I will rest me here, Conra, until you return. Leave me awhile with my thoughts, for they weigh heavy on my heart, and I feel as if some dire calamity overshadows my soul."

"It seems strange, Dubthach, that these forebodings should return at such a festive time. The croaking of the ravens around this gloomy house, frightened by the unusual din without, has woke these feelings in your mind. I would fain wish you to bear me company. I may not be permitted an audience."

"Take this ring, Conra, it is more potent than the command of the Ard-Riagh. Show it to the Lady Superior, and were it the daughter of Laegari you wished to consult, you dare not be denied. If you are unsuccessful in your suit, return for me, and I will accompany you. You will find me here. I am preparing my mind for the great encounter which I know, occurs to-morrow, and this silent spot is fitted for my thoughts. Go! I will await you."

Placing the gem on his finger which he received from the Druid, and bowing with profound respect, Conra left him to his meditations and proceeded through the dark avenue of trees that led to the College. A massive iron gate at the end barred his passage. The gloomy stillness that reigned appeared in marked contrast to the animated and joyous scenes he had so recently left. No living object was visible in or around the place. No sound was heard to proceed from the sombre and dark pile of buildings that rose before him. For a moment he was puzzled what course to pursue, to obtain admission. Suddenly his eye fell upon a horn, but so dim and dark that he doubted if it had been used for a century. Applying it to his lips, he blew a loud and shrill blast, whose tones sounded fearfully out of place in the dark and gloomy solitude that surrounded him. The echoes were the only answer he received, and, after waiting until his impatience turned into anger, he was about repeating the challenge in a more decided tone, when the wicket of the gate was drawn aside, and a voice, in an imperious manner, accosted him:

"Who's he that comes with such rude mien to disturb the repose of the holy virgins of Bel?"



"One, holy Sister, who is armed with a sword, would not intrude."

"Know you not that none but the holiest enter here? This is the retreat of the Sacred"

"I know it, daughter of Bel, but here my mother I must enter."

"Art thou a Druid?"

"I am Conra, the chief Druid of Dalaradia."

"Conra, thou art a holy and learned priest, in the faith. Thy name is heard when we offer to Bel. It pains me to forbid thee admittance, must be obeyed."

"Then, what thou denyest to me, in the name must grant to this."

He held the ring before her eyes, and as she with sudden lustre, she hastily drew back, with the wicket. But returning immediately in a humble tone she answered :

"Pardon me, holy Conra, for my churlish importunity is imperative on me, to know the object of your not act otherwise."

"I come to see the Princess Sybilla, and wish immediate audience."

"Your wishes shall be obeyed. Enter!"

The door swung on its hinges, and his guide long, flowing white veil, beckoned him to follow him to an apartment richly and luxuriously large, solid table stood in the centre, on which many rare manuscripts and books embossed in of curious make and cunning workmanship, the Romans and the Gauls, were disposed around these the Druid heeded not. His eye was volumes so invitingly spread before him ; he to look at them, and was seating himself at the purpose when the door was suddenly opened appeared. A veil, similar in texture and color, different style, inasmuch as it did not conceal flowed from her shoulders ; she was pale, but

simple and becoming costume, as the fairest of the daughters of Bel. The melancholy look which tinged her features, vanished for a moment as she recognized Conra, and a smile lit up her face as he rose to salute her.

"Welcome, Conra, to the halls of the holy Sisterhood!"

"Daughter of Milcho, this is the happiest moment I have known since I left Dalaradia!"

"Thy presence, holy Conra, ever inspires me with renewed courage, and brings balm to my heart."

"Thy inspiration comes from the gods, Sybilla. They favor thee. Thou hast been tried by fire and found true. But I came not here to praise thee for thy gifts, but to remind thee of thy duty on the morrow."

"What may it be, good Conra, I am eager to obey."

"It is this. When, in the holy temple, Dubthach, the chief Druid of the Sacred Isle, invokes his god for holy fire from heaven, mark well the result. The day-god's eye will kindle the holy fire; he sends it as a sign of his approval of those who pray to him. To none else is his love given. At the moment when his rays of love dart on the torch of Dubthach, offer yourself as a vestal before him, and raise the voice of your heart in humble supplication and homage to Bel. We have fallen on gloomy days. The nobles of the land are weak and irresolute of purpose, and it remains for the faithful and true, to combat the superstition and idolatry which are now permitted to stalk broadcast over the land. The temples of Bel are menaced by the Evil one, and darkness is brooding over Erinn!"

"Your words are enigmatical, good Conra, and, I fear me, I do not catch their meaning."

"Sybilla, wilt thou become a vestal and profess the creed of Bel, on the morrow, before the assembled nobles of Erinn?"

"I will, if the hour is at hand. I gave thee my pledge, Conra, in the sacred groves of Dalaradia, and have I faltered since?"

"No. Thou hast been true. But to-morrow shall try thee with a more dreadful ordeal than even thou witnessed in Dalaradia. Thy brothers, thy sisters, and Mahon will be there!"

"Even so. Have I not long  
are not my brothers and sisters  
tive of Milcho, and as such sha  
as he died!"

"But Sicur will be there also  
"What? Sicur, my father's

"Aye; thou mayest well call

"But how knowest thou al  
Dalaradia with thee, thy inform  
Not one in all broad Tir-owen,  
three weak followers, had joined  
since grown so great that they h  
army to confront us in our great

"They have come, and with a  
not in the martial sense in which  
with an army. When Mahon  
worshipped Bel, but since then t  
I know not but he has cast his sp  
not so well versed in the mysteri  
brothers were, Sybilla, and you l

"Then let them fall! Come v  
of this base swine-herd shall not e  
at the holy altar of Bel, I shall re  
the efforts of the weak and drive  
become a vestal!"

"Thou hast spoken well, Sybill  
thee for thy constancy."

"As it was not fated that I sho  
my father, I, at least, can live a h

"For some noble purpose hast t  
and thy name will yet be heard  
when the vestal fires are lighted o  
for thee to-morrow, and conduct t  
Sicur appears, and dares blasphem  
the vengeance of the day-god sha  
lightnings of his eye scathe and b  
shall behold the overthrow of thi  
the altars of the god of Erinn bla

holier light than ever blessed Bealtinne before. Be thou ready when I come!"

"I will. But good Conra, there is a passage in this book—a prophecy regarding this Sicur, which I would fain have thy aid in unravelling, if thou hast time."

"I have not, daughter. Dubthach awaits me at the gate, I left him to contemplation and heavy thoughts. The holy man has cares on the morrow, which will require his subtlest thought to overcome. But when he confronts this Sicur, thou wilt see the power of his god revealed, and the idolater and apostate vanquished! Till then, Sybilla, I must say farewell."

"Farewell, good Conra. You will find me ready when the hour approaches."

"I doubt it not, Sybilla, and may the gods fill thee with pleasant and holy thoughts till then. And so—farewell."

Affectionately kissing her hand, and bowing respectfully, he left the apartment and hastened to the side of the old Druid. He found him uneasily pacing up and down the emerald sward before the gate.

"Hast thou seen her, Conra?" he exclaimed, as the dark face of the Dalaradian appeared.

"I have!"

"Does the spirit of her father still animate her, or, like her brethren, has she become false to Bel?"

"She is true as thyself, Dubthach, and longs for the hour when she will become a member of the holy Sisterhood!"

"It is well, Conra. Too many have already proved false, and those who remain, I fear, will be sorely tried to-morrow. But let us depart. Wend your way by the 'Slope of Chariots,' I care not to see before my eyes the tents of the Christians. Numbers have arrived since we came here."

"Their numbers will diminish with the morn. Bel but waits for the Arch Druid to say the word, to crush them at a blow."

"May your words prove prophetic! There has been no peace in my heart since this foreigner landed. But I must to the Banquet Hall, to the King. Lead on, good Conra; I'll follow thee."

**▲ SCENE ON THE BATH OF TARA.**

\* Harp of the isle of manly hearts,  
The land of generous feelings,  
Thy sacred melody imparts  
A thousand fond revealings.  
It wakes within my glowing breast,  
A warmth which words have ne'er expressed,  
A patriotic feeling strong  
For thy own isle, the isle of song.  
It tells me of the days of old,  
When Erin saw her brave and bold  
Stand forth the champions of her right,  
In stern debate or bloody fight.  
It tells of th' immortal throng  
Of bards who poured the stream of song,  
That waked the rapture of the strings,  
For many an age in hall of kings;  
Where listening patriots blessed the lay  
That bade enraptured pulses play,  
As Erin's praises swelled the ardent strains,  
With beauty of maids, and valor of her swains."

—James McHenry.

Great was the bustle and excitement both inside and outside the palace of Tara. Inside, the monarch held royal revel. There was much running to and fro of squires, pages and slaves, attending to the wants of the guests, filling their cups with the generous vintage of Iberia, and eagerly waiting on their slightest nod. The king hospitably ordered a thousand measures of wine and ale to be distributed among those who remained outside the Banquet Hall. But so great was the pressure, that only those in the immediate precincts of the palace were aware of the generous order. However, they made amends, in their own way, for the largess they lost. Booths, tents, and stalls were erected under the shade of the trees that dotted the valleys and the hills, and in and around

these, thousands were congregated, sipping the mead, merrily joking with each other, or listening to the songs of the bards. The people were in good weather, their Ard-Riagh, and the anticipations of pleasure they all promised themselves for tomorrow.

The laughter and merriment excited by some king or his chiefs, could be plainly heard by the palace walls, and was, by the nearest, taken in which was borne onward until the very hills seemed at the deafening shout, raised by the vast assembly. Their merriment, however, was not boisterous. Their mugs of mead were often replenished fresh, and they kept themselves within bounds of decorous as such a vast gathering could well be.

A merry group, composed partly of soldiers and civilians, the latter predominating, was seated clinking their cups and quaffing their brown ale in abandon and familiar freedom. Their loud peeter rung merrily above the sound of pipe and harp conversation, interlarded at intervals with sly jests, seemed at once enlivening and contagious. Nearest them, but outside their circle, as if mirth-provoking infection, laughed oftener and moments flew on. And sometimes their look in the direction of the particular group we had as much as to say, "You are not enjoying yourselves as much as we are."

These churls that make such a racket better than their boisterous laughter?" asked "Who are these?" asked the man in the mantle which he had flung negligently over his shoulders, to belong to the tradesmen of Belus! they are as uproarious as the

"By the way, they are laughing at my jest, Dima. They are abundantly lacking in brains to appreciate the point?" "I, at least, feel the sting, Barrfinn. You

ced but does not rankle. By their dress  
them to be from the boisterous N.  
comrade?"

The question was addressed to an old soldier, who, with a half-finished cup laughingly listened to the friendly war-

"Yes," he replied, "they are war-  
accent betrays them. They are from

"Then, is it not outrageous to think the  
the rude mountains of Emania, can make  
at home among the pleasant groves and  
at the very doors of the Ard-Riagh, and  
mirth?"

"Curb your temper, good Dima," re-  
"You know not of whom you speak. You  
knock on your coxcombical crown, or the  
your ribs, if you addressed them thus."

"He would sooner beard the wolf and  
her den, Kiaran, than use such saucy lang-  
much less to a Dalaradian. You do not know

Dima bit his lip. He was chagrined to  
words had a contrary effect from what he  
about to answer angrily, when Kiaran again

"I know him not, Barrfinn, but I do know  
dians are the swiftest in the chase, the wisest  
the gayest in revel, and the bravest in battle.  
king was a Dalaradian."

"And the Dalaradians," retorted Dima,  
the first to prove false to the gods of Erin,  
one who was their swine-herd?"

"To whom do you allude?" asked Kiaran

"To him whose tents even now whiten the  
Colpa\* To Sicur, of whom you have heard

"I have heard of him from Fergus, Miles  
last he tarried here; and I have seen him  
returning from my first campaign in Gaul.  
bird of ill omen in Dalaradia."

\*The Boyne.

"And never so ill favored as now. He has seduced the sons and daughters of Milcho from the gods, and comes here to convert the Ard-Riagh, himself. Ha! ha!"

"He aims high, Dima. But what did you say of Milcho?"

"Milcho is dead. He scorned the creed of a swine-herd, and died by his own hand, a death of fire!"

"A fitting death for such a warlike heart. But have his children become recreant to the gods?"

"All but one, the princess Sybilla."

"And she," said Barrfinn, "was captured by the Druids, and borne to Tara. 'Tis said, she is the loveliest maiden in Erin; that the Druids hide her from human ken; and as soon as she becomes a Vestal, she will rank above all the Virgins of Bel."

"May the fangs of the foul fiend compress me!" exclaimed the soldier, vehemently, "but I would like to gaze upon her beauty. I saw her mother on her marriage day, and a sweeter rose never bloomed in Emania."

"She is a worthy daughter of Milcho, Kiaran, and, if report belies her not, as good as she is beauteous."

"She is sprung from a noble race, Barrfinn; but methinks thou art mistaken concerning her brothers. They are noble youths, such as the gods admire."

"Their admiration may well cease, then," exclaimed the cynic, Dima, "for they have forsaken the gods, and know them no more. They have become Christians, and are followers of yonder impostor, whose white tent you can see from here. Is it not strange," continued Dima, musingly, as he turned, with the others, towards the river, "that when a man once gets a new-fangled idea in his head—no matter how absurd it may be; no matter how opposed to sense, law and logic, he is not content with keeping the mine of knowledge to himself, but he must needs publish it to the world—become a reformer, and, though death be the penalty of his rashness, maintain it with his life. Our annals tell us that, when Crimthann\* swayed the sceptre in Erin, there dwelt one Kinncait,

\* In the twelfth year of this king's reign was born OUR SAVIOUR, JESUS CHRIST.—*Keating*.



a herdsman of the Attacotti, or Plebeian tribe, among the mountains of the West. This Kinncait imagined that he was more fitted for governing men than herding sheep, and succeeded in imbuing a few companions with this idea. For years he labored to instill it into his tribe, and at last succeeded in making them as crazy as himself. He determined on the utter extinction of the nobility of the land; and to effect his purpose, invited them to a great feast on the plains of Wagh-Bolog.\* The nobles in all sincerity accepted the invitation of the Plebeians, and for three days feasted and mingled among them. But on the evening of the third day, the Plebeians, at a preconcerted signal, fell upon them, and all were slaughtered but three queens, who escaped beyond the sea.

Then Kinncait proclaimed himself Ard-Riagh, and the gods permitted him to reign five years. But they were offended, and evil was the condition of Erinn during this time. For the earth did not yield its fruits to the Attacotti. The corn and produce of the land were barren; there used to be but one grain upon the stalk, one acorn upon the oak, and one nut upon the hazel. Shipless were her harbors, fruitless her trees, and milkless her cattle; so that a general famine prevailed, during the five years that the herdsman was in the sovereignty. Well, the gods at last became appeased, and striking Kinncait with death, again made Erinn fruitful. Now, to my thinking," he continued, seeing his hearers were interested, "it would be better to slay yonder impostor at first, before he could do any mischief, or offer him up as a sacrifice to the gods, rather than wait until their ire became aroused, and cause us to suffer for his blasphemies. For, though he holds a different creed from Kinncait, his doctrines are more pernicious and degrading."

"Thou art a philosopher, Dima, and more fitted for a Bre-hon than a weaver of wool. Dost think this Christian will overthrow Bel?"

"Psha!" returned Dima, contemptuously, "I laugh at his folly. But, nevertheless, there are fools and weaklings in the world, and while these exist there will be dupes. He has entangled the Dalaradians in the meshes of his net."

\* See Way.

"By the soul of Heber!" exclaimed the soldier, fiercely, "yonder few beggarly tents strike more terror to your craven hearts, than did those of the Romans in Gaul, to the meanest Dalaradian, though the shadows of their spears darkened the vineyards as they passed. What of this Christian, and what does he teach?"

"Didst ask that question of Barrfinn, Kiaran, thy head would be as old as Ossian's ere he returned a truthful answer. A scurvy jest, which he thinks to pass for wit, is his only stock in trade; and so sorry are they, that they sometimes make himself cry. But of this Christian. He believes not in war. He says we were born to live in peace and harmony, like doves in a nest; that we should not make a raid on a neighboring nation, nor a foray on a foeman's camp, even after they have injured us, but forgive them and put up with the wrong."

"By the rays of the glorious Belus!" exclaimed the impetuous soldier, interrupting, "who ever heard of such a doctrine as this?"

"It is monstrous! But this is not all. He says Bel is a false god; that his God, one with three heads,—ha!—but who never shows himself to his followers, is the only true one. And that Bel is an impostor; that Heber and Heremon, and Miessius, and Nial, and all the Gaels, kings, warriors, brehons, druids and bards, who have lived here from the time of the Deluge, were wrong in worshipping the sun-god, and that they are now suffering eternal torments in the bowels of the earth."

"The blasphemer should suffer death."

"Said I not so, Barrfinn? This foreigner should not be permitted to live one day in Erinn."

"Phaw!" said Kiaran, contemptuously turning his face from the river, and looking in an opposite direction. "The Gaels are not children to be inveigled by such silly pratt e."

"But I tell thee Kiaran, thy friends, the Dalaradians, believe and follow him. All but the Princess Sybilla."

"Then he has glamored them with his diabolical spella. She inherits the spirit of her brave father; and by the light of Bel, 'twould be glorious to pass one's life in her service!"

"Hush!" whispered Barrfinn, softly, "some chieftain approaches. Who may he be?"

"No, it is the chief Arch-Druid, and Conra, of Dalaradia. Make way! they are going to the palace."

The two Druids, with their tunics wrapped closely around them, moved slowly through the crowd, who made way on each side to let them pass, standing with uncovered heads and respectfully saluting. The noise became hushed at their approach, and the harpers struck up a hymn of praise to Bel. As they reached our little group of revellers, the military uniform of Kiaran attracted the eye of Conra. A smile of recognition appeared for a moment on his gloomy face. The old campaigner saluted in military style, and gazed with admiration on the priests of Bel. Conra paused for a moment, and then beckoned to Kiaran to follow. He obeyed. They had gone but a few paces, and stood beside the group of Dalaradians, when the Druid suddenly stopped and whispered in the ear of Kiaran. The latter remained in a respectful attitude of attention, and, when dismissed by Conra, again saluted and returned to his friends.

"By all the gods of Erinn! but thou art a lucky dog, Kiaran," exclaimed Dima, "to be thus singled out among such a sea of people, as a confidential friend and counsellor of the two greatest and highest Druids in the sacred Isle. Barrfinn will now cease his jesting, for the honor has been given too publicly to be ignored, even by him."

"Heed not this weaver's prate, comrade," returned Barrfinn, "his tongue makes as much noise as his own loom, but rather bethink thee of using thy influence with thy holy friends, in procuring me something better suited to my tastes than that of charioteer to a gouty old dotard. Now, as cup-bearer in the Banquet Hall, or as a dispenser of wine and mead at the revels, I think I would be unequalled. By keeping on good terms with the butlers and brewers, a friend might find it convenient to visit me, as I could afford to be more hospitable than what my present circumstances permit. Dima would find my jokes more palatable, when backed up by a good cup of wine, than he deems them now. And besides, Kiaran——"

"A truce to your jesting, Barrfinn," interrupted the bluff soldier, good-humoredly, "I have been honored just now, and you want me to pay the penalty in a stoup of wine. And I will. For I have received a greater honor than you wrot of."

"Have we not seen you in familiar terms with the two Arch-Druids of Erin?"

"Yea. But a greater honor awaits me on the morrow!"

"Perchance, you are invited to the Ard-Riagh's palace," said Dima, with a sneer.

"Even greater than that."

"In the name of Belus! what can it be?"

"To conduct the Princess Sybilla, from the College of Sacred Virgins, to the holy temple, and from thence to the palace!"

Dima and Barrfinn looked at each other in astonishment. To enter the precincts of the Sacred College was an honor, which even the king could not obtain, without the sanction of the Arch-Druid; and, to be the protector of the Princess Sybilla, even for an hour, of whose beauty and sanctity all Erin had heard, and whose praise was in every mouth, was something so sudden and unexpected, that, for a moment, it took away their breaths. They stood gazing at Kiaran in mute astonishment. He enjoyed their surprise. His outward appearance was calm, but his heart beat high with pride, at the signal favor bestowed upon him. He knew their thoughts. Young as they were, they would freely exchange their youth for his gray hairs, to enjoy the privilege of being by her side, and gazing on her beauty for a moment. It was the proudest hour of the old soldier's life, and he enjoyed it to the utmost.

"Nay, never stare so blankly at me," he said smilingly, putting a hand on each of their shoulders. "Surely you do not envy an old standard-bearer of Milcho, the honor of escorting and protecting his daughter for a time. Let us enter the booth and have some wine; it will serve to drown all envious feelings, and is a good antidote for a troubled spirit."

"Kiaran is right," said Dima, "He can well afford to spend a few Roman coins on his good luck, for it is no barren

honor he will enjoy to-morrow. But for my part, I prefer to remain here, on the green sward, with the light of the day-god streaming on us, to the pent-up heat and villainous atmosphere of a booth. Here we can see the day-god as he sinks to rest, and pour a loving libation to the Princess Sybilla."

"And if permitted, I will join you with all my heart, good Dima," said an old and venerable man, stepping to Kiaran's side, and addressing Dima, "For never did summer breeze woo cheek of lovelier maiden, and never did rose bud, when wet with dew, look half so fair and fresh as Sybilla, of Dalaradia."

"And never was friend more welcome to Kiaran, than Fergus, the Bard of Dalaradia!" exclaimed the old soldier, embracing Fergus, for it was he, and seating him by his side on the sward. "Old comrade mine, in many a fierce campaign, give me your hand. How fares it in Dalaradia? Sad stories are told, (and they lose nothing when friend Dima repeats them,) of Milcho's children and clansmen. Dima says, that all but Sybilla, have gone over to the Evil One. Is it so?"

"It is not true, Kiaran. Never was Dalaradia so blessed as now; never were her children so firm in the faith as now!"

"Ha! I knew it," said Kiaran proudly, mistaking the true meaning of Fergus's words. "The jack-daw prates when the eagle is abroad, but hides his head in the furze when he hears the rustle of his wing."

"I told you his own loom clicked not so loud as he, when fairly started. Like the raven, he is ever croaking," put in Barrfin, who wickedly enjoyed the discomfiture of his friend.

"I did but tell the tale as I heard it," returned Dima, humbled and crest fallen.

"Well, well, we'll not dispute about a rumor," said Kiaran, "I am too happy to let any passing shadow chill my heart. Bring more wine, for never was I in merrier mood."

The wine was brought, and Kiaran, holding a sparkling beaker in his hand rose to his feet.

"Here's to the Princess Sybilla, the pearl of Emania, the beloved of the gods and the gem of the Sacred Isle."

"Hast seen her lately, Fergus?" he enquired, after draining his cup and resuming his grubby seat.

"No. It is nine moons since I have been in Tara."

"I would ask thee if she resembled her mother, were it not that I may judge for myself on the morrow. I am commanded by Conra, to escort her from the Sacred College, to the temple, where she is to become a vestal. I suppose, Fergus, your harp will chant a strain in her honor."

Fergus smiled. The information he was receiving from Kiaran, was what he had for two days been seeking in vain. And though he hated hypocrisy in any form, he was determined by all legitimate means in his power, to gain all the intelligence he could regarding her. If Kiaran mis-construed his meaning that was his own fault, and to acknowledge himself a Christian, without the question being put to him directly, he did not consider diplomacy at the present juncture. The wily old Bard determined to be on his guard, and give such answers as would not compromise him; but at the same time, would not smack of anything condemnatory of the faith he professed. Believing that St. Patrick would prevail, and on the succeeding day not only change the heart of Sybilla, but of the Ard-Riagh also, he answered in the fulness of his heart's hope.

"Aye! Kiaran, it will. Never did its most ambitious flight wing so high, as on the day Sybilla becomes a child of God. It will soar high as the eagle over the valley of the Finn, and like its waters, be as bright and pure, or else this hand has lost its cunning!"

"Ah! Fergus, we were friends in youth. I have heard thee harp the battle hymn, on the first morning we met the Armoricans, these dwellers on the utmost verge of the sea, whose arms were stout and rough as the grey icebergs from the north, that floated past their town. They were the conquered allies of the Romans. Ours were the slow-paced Saxons, breeders of sharp-horned cattle, whom we despised, but came to save from the wrath of the conquering Roman. Our legions were outnumbered, and we feared for the fate of our Sun-burst flag in battle. But when the strains of thy harp burst on our ears, we cast the slothful Saxon aside, and in the headlong shock of our onset, shattered the Roman hosts

and vanquished his daring eagle. Dost remember, Fergus?"

"I do, old comrade, well," replied the Bard, warming at the recollection of the events thus vividly conjured up. "Nial led the van, with his Dalaradians, and Milcho with the warriors of the Braid, trod on his shadow as he charged the foe!"

"Ay! and how gloriously we sacked the town, and clutched our slaves and other booty, over the dead bodies of the Romans! Thy harp, Fergus, was then as potent as a legion of spears. Milcho loved its tones as well in the field as in the Banquet Hall. Surely thou hast not forgotten thy deftness in touching the strings, and canst harp a lay of love or praise for the daughter, as well as a war-song for the sire?"

"That I can, good Kiaran, and right willingly shall I perform the office."

"Then I hope to hear thee to-morrow, Fergus. Thou wilt see me, as I enter the palace with Sybilla, and my heart will be expectant to hear thy song. But fill up, comrades, the wine is laggard in its place!"

"We have been so absorbed in your warlike reminiscences," replied Dima, "that we have forgotten everything else."

"And the day-god is sinking low, which warns me that my master will think his charioteer is also a laggard to tarry away so long," said Barrfinn, rising.

"Let us drink one bumper to the memory of Nial ere we part," said Kiaran.

"With all my heart. The loom must remain idle when such jolly comrades meet," responded Dima, filling up a generous draught.

"Thou wouldst make a jolly comrade in the camp, Dima, whatever thou mightest be in the field."

"The camp would suit me better, Kiaran. But no matter. Here's to the memory of thy great hero, and another meeting on to-morrow."

"I must haste me to the rath, to warn my spearmen of their duty at early morn."

"And I must also depart, Kiaran," answered Fergus, to meet Congal and Cathal, and welcome them to Tara."

"Which way lies your path?"

"By the river."

"And mine—this way. Farewell till to-morrow."

They separated, each taking a different route, and elbowing their way as best they could, through the crowd. Fergus proceeded towards the river, where the white tent of Patrick was set. He did not go directly to it, but making a detour to the left, where the crowd was not so densely packed, and where he could better elude recognition, he slowly, and in a seemingly, careless manner, pursued his way. The breeze of the evening was laden with the tones of a thousand harps, and the notes of the pipe, mellowed by distance, fell upon his ear. The sun was setting in a crimson cloud, and the spires and domes glittered in rays of burnished gold. The silvery river glided peacefully before him, and on its banks reposed—the brightest object to him in all that glorious panorama—the Cross. There soared the sign of Purity, of Truth, and Immortality, the burden borne by the Saviour, the emblem of man's redemption.

Stealing unperceived to a thicket on the river's banks, he drew from thence a small curragh, and launching it, struck boldly out into the stream. He had scarcely gained the centre, when a cry rose from the hosts of Tara, and he perceived a crowd running to the banks. The words "renegade," and "traitor," were shouted after him, stones were thrown in thousands at him and his frail bark; he heeded them not, but boldly steered for the further shore. He gained it in safety, and running up the sloping bank, paused not until he reached the tent of St. Patrick. There he was met by the good Saint himself, Prince Mahon, Congal, Cathal, Conall, Una, Ova, and Elie, who rushed out to meet and welcome him.



## CHAPTER XX.

## THE MEETING AT TARA.

The monarch saw and shook,  
 And bade no more rejoice;  
 All bloodless waxed his look,  
 And tremulous his voice.  
 "Let the men of lore appear,  
 The wisest of the earth,  
 And expound the words of fear,  
 Which mar our royal mirth."

—Byron.

It was Easter Eve with the Christians, and Bealtinne with the Pagans. It was also the birth-day of the king. To celebrate his nativity he assembled the nobility, the chiefs, the Druids, and the Brehons of Erin to Tara. To him came the Kings and Princes, with their thousands of followers—clad in military panoply—in their strength, in their pride and power, in all the magnificence of barbaric splendor, with waving banners and dancing plumes. Their chariots, drawn by fiery and restive steeds, which champed the bit in anger at the unwilling thralldom which they endured, and foamed with fury at the curbsome rein, scorning the gay trapping which caparisoned them, passed in hundreds up the road known as the "Slope of the Chariots," bearing with them the pride, the beauty, and the manhood of Erin.

From each of the four roads that led from royal Tara converged a countless crowd, whose many-colored and varying, but picturesque costumes, added a brighter tinge to the glorious landscape as it lay outspread, crimsoned in glory by the rising sun. Far as the eye could reach, a swarm of human beings darkened the roads, filled the valleys, and dotted

the mountain sides, all eagerly pressing forward to the capital of Erin. Their banners shone proudly in the morning air; the blare of their trumpets woke the slumbering echoes to life, and the sound of their harps filled the pure May air with a more delicious melody than the lark, which stood poised in mid air, silenced and entranced by the sweet sounds wafted from below. Every hearth was cold in Erin. The fires were extinguished on this day; and, until such time as the Arch-Druid drew fire from heaven—from the Sun-god—it was death to kindle a flame\*. From the four points of the Island they came, with brands and torches, to receive a part of the celestial fire to replenish their hearths. For days previous to the one appointed for the opening of the ceremonies, the people had been flocking thither, and on this the first day of the *Feis*, more than a million of souls were encamped at Tara.

Laegari, son of Nial, convened this assembly, according to the usage of his predecessors, among other reasons, for the purpose of reforming the customs and laws of his kingdom, at the general convention of the nation. When the nobles and Ollamhs of Ireland met together on such occasions, the Ard-Riagh, or sovereign King of Ireland, dwelt with his household, apart from the rest, in a palace which was specially reserved as his royal residence. Besides this, each of the Provincial Kings had a royal residence appropriated to himself at Tara. And in addition to these, there were three other buildings, one of which was called the "Stronghold of the Hostages," where the king kept his prisoners; and another, the "Star of the Bards." In the latter the Brehons, Ollamhs, and Bards held their sittings; and here fines and erics were imposed

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\* "This was the time in which the great festival of the Gentiles, i. e. the *Feis of Tara*, was usually celebrated. The Kings, and princes, and chieftains were wont to come to Laeghari McNeil, to Tara, to celebrate the festival. The Druids and magicians were also wont to come to prophesy to them. The fire of every hearth in Erin was usually extinguished on that night; and it was commanded by the king, that no fire should be lighted in Erin before the fire of Tara; and neither gold nor silver would be accepted from anyone who would light it, but he should suffer death for it."—*Tripartite Life of St. Patrick*.

upon those who violated the laws and customs of the nation. The third building was named the "Palace, or House of the Ladies." Here the Provincial Queens, with the female members of their families resided, each in her own private apartments, but within the enclosure of the building. But when the Convention met to originate or confirm laws and rules for the nation, it held its sessions in a grand hall, called the "Hall of Public Deliberation."\*

At the appointed hour, the king, attended by his chiefs, Brehons, and Bards, left the palace and proceeded to the great temple. This was situate on the verge of the "Slope of the Chariots." It was built in a semi-circular form, open to the heavens, and at a point on the highest eminence of the road, which was easily distinguishable at a distance. It was of the cyclopean architecture of the Druids, who forbade the use of any stone-cutter's chisel upon the great granite blocks which formed the walls of their temples. A Cromlech or altar was built on the centre of the floor of the sacred enclosure. Here the Irish Gaels were assembled, kneeling on the very verge of the mystic circle, within which none but the Druids and sacrificers durst enter, on pain of instant death. The Cromlech, a huge, rude mass of granite, without crack or flaw, was supported on five unequal pillars. Its surface was grooved that the victim's blood might flow into a stone basin below.

Following the king and his retinue, came the provincial kings and chiefs. Congal, as Lord of Dalaradia, took his place convenient to the Ard-Riagh. He was accompanied by Cathal and Fergus. Mahon, the young prince of Augher, with his attendants, Ibar, Felim, and Carbre, followed, and after them came a hundred princes with their retinues of slaves and clansmen. Dina and Barrfinn, the former with a sneer on his lip, as he occasionally glanced toward the river, where St. Patrick and his disciples were encamped, occupied positions from which they could conveniently watch the proceedings, and have a good view of the temple.

When the chiefs had taken their respective places, the

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\* Keating.

queens and princesses, the wives and daughters of the nobility came forward to the places reserved for them. Then a blast of a trumpet sounded, and from the Sacred College issued forth a band of white-robed maidens, the vestals of Bel. Behind them followed those who had served their novitiate, and among them Sybilla. Kiaran, with a chosen band of spear-men, accompanied her, and the smile that lit up his features revealed the pleasure that sparkled in his heart. The fame of her beauty, and her heroic resistance of the Christian's doctrine had preceded her arrival at Tara; and the proud pagan hearts assembled there—each one as heroic as her own—beat in unison with hers, and gloried in the anticipated triumph, which they believed Bel would achieve over the Christian catiff, who dared blaspheme his name. Her towering stature, her marvellous beauty, and her proud, imperial look, combined with the intense devotion she had shown for Bel and Erinn, inflamed these hearts with an admiration and love only equalled by that which they professed for the Ard-Riagh himself. All eyes were centered upon her; the kneeling figures, bowing to their gods, in what was to them the holy of holies, raised their heads as she passed, to gaze upon her, and ten thousand hearts went out in homage at her shrine.

Her dark eyes, fearless and defiant, swept the circle in their immediate gaze. They rested for a passing moment on Mahon, and their look of scorn almost chilled him to the heart. She glanced at Cathal and Congal, and a blush of shame mantled her pale face. She looked at Una, Elie, and Ova, and her affection, her tenderness and love exhaled the dew of her soul to her eyes, and her pride and patriotism alone kept the tears that fringed her eyelids, from trickling down her cheeks. She saw before her the loved ones of her house and heart, renegades to the faith and god of Erinn; she saw her brothers and sisters, for whom that heart would rend its inmost core, to save them from a pang of pain, faithless and dishonored before the chiefs, the nobles, and the Ard-Riagh of Erinn. For Mahon and her brothers her look evinced contempt; but for Una and her sisters, compassion mingled with reproach and love.

The king sat on his throne. His warriors, bards and priests were there. He waited, as did a million hearts, for the appearance of the Arch-Druid. He came. Surrounded by a throng of followers he approached the sacred precincts of the temple. Next to him came Conra. The Sun, the god of their idolatry, was approaching meridian. In beauty and brightness he shone upon the spires and domes of Tara. The scintillating rays of his beams danced in gladness upon the green sward beneath, and on the lofty turrets that raised their proud fronts to his ardent gaze. As his devotees looked upon him, they read in each other's faces a triumphant answer to the unpleasant and perplexing questions, which the presence of the Christians had inspired in their hearts. They felt jubilant, for on this day they believed the Christian and his God would be vanquished.

The Arch-Druid, entering the inner circle of the temple, prostrated himself before Bel, and invoked his assistance in kindling the holy fire of the Sacred Isle. Then rising, he proceeded to consummate the sacrifice usual on such an occasion. A lamb was slaughtered on the altar, and its blood, caught in the stone bowl underneath, was thrown into the flames. Again prostrating himself to earth, he breathed a prayer, and rising to his feet, beckoned Conra to approach him. Taking from his hands a piece of perfumed wood, marked with cabalistic characters, he held it with outstretched hand towards the sun. Every breath was stilled, every head was bowed, every heart prayed in adoration and homage to the sun-god. The king and his chiefs knelt mute and motionless. The thousands assembled there, with fear and trembling waited for the power of their god to be made manifest. It was an awful, a solemn moment to these believers in Bel. A silence deep and profound reigned, and nothing, save the beating of their hearts, was audible. Hushed, breathless and still, the kneeling multitude looked in pious wonder on the gorgeously-robed priest, as he stood within the holy circle invoking fire from heaven.

At that moment a cry of agony burst from Conra, so wild and piercing in feeling and intensity, that it seemed to freeze

the people's blood with terror; and with a bound they leaped upon their feet. The Arch-Druid paused in astonishment; the king frowningly grasped the jewelled hilt of his skein, and all eyes for a moment were concentrated on the Dalarian Druid. The angry look on his face was terrible. He seemed the impersonation of hate and evil, as with outstretched hand he pointed to the Hill of Slane.

And there upon that holy hill, made holy forevermore by the events of this day, rose a dense volume of smoke, its spiral wreaths hiding the face of their boasted sun-god, and piercing to the clouds. It rose on the stilly atmosphere, at first no bigger than an infant's hand, and faint as an infant's breath; but as it ascended in the golden sun-light, denser and still more dense it grew, until the skies and valleys were enveloped in its embrace.

Then, as if the breath of the living god had breathed upon it, leaped out a flame of fire, whose burning darts soared upward to the heavens and lighted, in the skies of Erinn, a glory and a brightness that have never waned! It was a spark of love from the radiant fountain of God's heart, sent in his mercy, to the pagan children of Erinn. It was the star, destined in future ages, to guide them through centuries of martyrdom and seas of blood. It was the Paschal fire, kindled by the Christian, St. Patrick, in honor of the Saviour, that melted the idols of Erinn's false gods, and broke down the bulwarks of paganism in the Island!

Filled with wrath, King Laegaeri and his warriors saw the light flashing over the plain. Had the thunderbolts of heaven fallen upon them, they could not have been more astonished. For a moment they looked at each other in wonder. Then the king, with dark and scowling brow, standing erect and nervously clutching his skein, demanded of the Arch-Druid:

"Who has dared to violate the commands of an Ard-Riagh of Erinn, and impiously profane her temples and her gods?"

The Druid answered not, but kept his eyes fixed steadfastly on the fire as if he were fascinated by the sight. But Conra, whose face was livid with rage turning toward the king, said:

"The man who has kindled this fire O King! is one, who

if not immediately destroyed, will wrest from you, your kingdom; and if this fire is not extinguished to-day, and now, will never be extinguished in Erin. He brings from barbaric Rome the germ of a false creed to plant in Erin and overthrow her gods. He is a Christian, and his name is Sicur!"

"Then by the glory of Belus! he shall die!" fiercely exclaimed the king, "This outrage must be avenged."

Turning from Conra his eye glanced around the circle of Nobles and Warriors, until his gaze fell upon the sweet and noble countenance of Mahon. There it rested. Sybilla followed the look of the king. Congal and Cathal, believing that Conra had informed the king of his conversion, trembled for the safety of their friend. A proud smile curled the lip of Sybilla, as she listened to the command of the king. As he spoke, she shot a meaning glance at Conra, which was understood and returned by him.

"Prince of Tir-owen," said the monarch, "take with you a band of spearmen, and bring before us this impostor, this blasphemer of the gods of Erin. By the advice of our holy priests, we shall here await your return. But linger not on the way, we warn you, for we wish the atonement to be swift as our vengeance will be just and terrible!"

Mahon, bowing lowly before the throne, departed on his mission, leaving behind him many hearts burning with different impulses and convictions, but all anxiously waiting and expecting the arrival of him, who had caused such consternation and terror among them.

They had not long to wait. Mahon, accompanied by St. Patrick, soon appeared before them. Grim, silent and stern, the king and his followers looked as the holy man of God confronted them. None saluted him, none rose to do him honor; for the king had commanded them to show him no courtesy. But despite his command, there was one, as the Saint passed on his way to the monarch, who rose and bade him welcome. This was the bard Erc, the son of Diga, "whose heart was touched by divine grace." The beauty and benignity of the Saint's countenance, touched the hearts of all, save the King

and Conra. Alone, friendless and unprotected he appeared among them. Relying solely on the God whom he adored, and the strange faith which he professed, touched their chivalrous souls with admiration, and caused them to give him a patient hearing.

The proud, unyielding monarch was wedded to his gods; for centuries he believed them to have been the bulwarks of Erin; and to all who opposed them, his heart was adamant. Nevertheless, though inflamed with anger at the insult given them, the noble bearing of St. Patrick, served to mollify for a time, even his wrath.

"A strange scene followed. The King asked St. Patrick many questions; the Druids contended with him, and insolently denounced his preaching, especially the doctrine of the Trinity. These rude men, accustomed to decide arguments by blows, rather than by words, required some extraordinary evidence of the power of this god, of whom they had never heard before, and whom they were little inclined to reverence."\*

It was forthcoming. Of all those who opposed him none was so malignant as Conra. He was especially obdurate and blasphemous in his language. He cursed the Saint and his god, and called upon Belus to annihilate him. He harangued the king and his nobles, and reminded them of the power and glory of their native land; that through the protection of Bel a hundred victories had been gained over the Christian hosts in Gaul, and that his displeasure and anger would be made manifest in some terrible manner, were the Christian allowed to practice his false and unholy doctrines.

"He is a blasphemer and impostor," exclaimed the angry Druid. "His god is false, he is the ally of the Evil One and the enemy of Bel! If he is more powerful than the gods of Erin let him show his power! or why does he send a swineherd as his ambassador? He has insulted our holy religion and broken the laws and customs of the land; and for these crimes, death is decreed. He has impiously profaned our

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\* Cusack's Life of St. Patrick.



holy temple, and interrupted us in one of our most solemn rites. He has intruded on the sacred precincts of our sacred groves, and by his evil spells and incantations, taken from Bel and our Ard-Riagh, the allegiance which is due them. For these crimes he must suffer death, and for this, O King! we demand his blood!"

A murmur of approbation rose from the multitude. Encouraged by this, Conra became more fierce in his invectives; and while the great pagan host, clamored for the Saint's blood, uttered fierce and horrible blasphemies against the most High God.

"I spurn ye and your accursed symbol," he shouted pointing, with a gesture of disdain, to the cross, which the Saint held in his hand. "If there is any power in it, or in your god, perform it on me before the men of Erin!"

He stood before the Apostle, a fierce and malignant sneer mantling his dark and frowning face, and dared him to the issue with Bel. The few Christian hearts present beat with fearful rapidity. They looked upon Saint Patrick, as he stood calm, resolute and fearless before his enemies. While the pagan priest's bosom glowed with triumph and exultation, at the victory he had so easily achieved while the king was in the act of giving orders for his immediate arrest and death, slowly the Christian raised the cross in his hands, and held it before the face of the blaspheming Druid. For a second he looked upon it in scorn, and then—quick as the lightning cleaves the oak of the forest, threw up his arms with a shriek and fell dead at the feet of the Saint!

"Let God arise, and let his enemies be scattered," exclaimed Patrick, looking sternly at the king. The latter, though terrified, was not convinced, and was about to reply in a haughty and indignant tone, when a shrill and piercing shriek again burst on their astonished ears, but this time in the tones of a female. Mahon heard it, and wildly rushing to the spot, where the virgins of the Sacred College stood, caught Sybilla in his arms, as she fell fainting and terrified to the ground.

## CHAPTER XXI.

## THE BAPTISM OF SYBILLA.

Ring, ye priests, your deep Te Deums; bards, make answer loud and long,  
 In your rapture flinging heavenward censers of triumphant song.  
 Isle for centuries blind in bondage, lift once more thine ancient boast,  
 From the cliffs of Innishowen southward on to Carbery's coast.  
 We have seen the Right made perfect; seen the Hand, that rules the spheres  
 Glance like lightning, through the clouds, and backward roll the wrongful  
 years.

—*Aubrey De Vere.*

The red deer roams on Tulla's side,  
 These hills are cold and bare,  
 The Arney's waters sweetly glide,  
 And Cahir's woods are fair.  
 The flowers that spring by Annalee  
 Might grace the proudest queen,  
 O! lady, haste, and come with me  
 To Alva's woodlands green.

She listened to the minstrel's lay,  
 She heard his footsteps nigh,  
 Then brushed a trembling tear away,  
 That dimmed her soft blue eye;  
 She flung the lattice open wide,  
 And whispered, soft and low,  
 "To-night whatever may betide,  
 Along with thee I'll go."

—C.

"Room for the Princess Sybilla," he shouted, bearing her in his arms, and making frantic efforts to burst through the throng. "Make way, comrades and clansmen, and let the pure breath of heaven blow upon her. She has swooned." Congal, Cathal, Fergus, Ibar and his comrades now made their appearance, and casting those nearest them aside, with their strong arms opened a space for Mahon to pass.

"This way to the well of Leagh,\* Prin  
 "'Tis but a few paces thither, and its cool  
 waters will soon revive her."

Quickly following this advice, so opportu-  
 nity, old bard, and treading in the footsteps  
 comrades, the young prince soon gained to  
 and laid Sybilla gently down on the mat  
 and brothers readily spread on the ground. With  
 hands, he took from the bubbling spring a  
 and sprinkled her face and neck. The thin  
 respectful distance from the young nobles,  
 fanning her temples, aided by the generous  
 her to consciousness. Opening her eyes, she  
 around. A shudder passed over her frame  
 Mahon; but immediately recalling the scene  
 witnessed, she raised herself to a sitting po-  
 sition inquired for the Saint.

"Where is Sicur? Bring him to me. O  
 tians! help an erring child! I believe in Thee  
 art truly the God of Heaven and Earth.  
 been tempted by the Evil One, and deceived  
 Conra! Brothers, pardon my fault, for I  
 thou, Mahon, canst thou forgive me?"

"Ay, freely, willingly, Sybilla, and I  
 has at length shown to thee the grace  
 of truth!"

"O Mahon! I have been blind, and groping  
 but, praised be thy God! mine eyes are open  
 Cathal and Congal bent over her, and  
 Their hearts were too full for utterance.  
 dewed their eyes, and their bosoms heaved  
 holy happiness. They gazed upon her with

\* Afterwards called Tober Patrick. This well was  
 several mentioned in the prose and poetic descriptions  
 in Dr. Petrie's Essay; but this, most likely, was the  
 and Loigleas, in the Book of Armagh, which lay to  
 Riagh, the great royal residence, and in which Tirecha-  
 rick baptized St. Eric, after his conversion, and many t  
 day.—Petrie's "Essay on Tara," page 16.

pressed to her side, and caressed her with feelings of the most intense devotion. How bright she looked. How fair she shone before Mahon; her glorious beauty lit up with that tenderness and indefinable splendor, which Christianity alone can impart to the female face. He had longed for this hour; had yearned for this moment; and now, when it had come, he could scarcely realize its truth.

A stir among the crowd warned them, that the Saint was approaching. Fergus, who had been dispatched after him, appeared, guiding him to the well. As he approached Sybilla, she rose to her feet, and rushed to meet him. She kissed his vestments, and, throwing herself on the ground, clasped his knees, and supplicated him to save her.

"O Sicur! Patricius, holy man of God! save me! save me! for I believe!"

"Arise, daughter!" tenderly replied the Saint, taking her hand, "arise, and be baptized!"

Leading her to the well, he was about administering the sacrament when Kiaran, who had been intently looking on, stepped forward, and professed his belief in Christ. He also begged to be baptized. But ere the Saint could answer, Duna and Barrfinn, who had followed their old friend Kiaran, silently knelt by his side. The awful and sudden death of Conra, and the speedy conversion of Sybilla, gave an impetus to the feelings with which the Saint inspired them; and they crowded in hundreds round the well, to receive the first sacrament of the Church, and become children of God.

The tidings of Sybilla's conversion and Conra's fearful death, soon spread among the multitude, and great was the fear and wonder the intelligence evoked. The dead body of the Druid was borne from the presence of the king, by his satellites, but though the power manifested by the Saint filled the monarch with fear, he was still wedded to his gods, and like Milcho, was too proud and stubborn to bend. Returning to his palace, with dark and sullen brow, he paced his chamber, muttering at intervals fierce words, which boded no good to the Christian Apostle.

Meanwhile, from the four roads, from the "Slope of the

Chariots," from every nook and corner of royal Tara, ing throng pressed forward to meet and feast their him, who had wrought such wonders in Erin. He, rounded by thousands who eagerly clamored for ad into the true fold. It seemed as if a ray of God's gl fallen from heaven, and a spark of His divine love limity, had centered in the heart of the Saint. And was so. Never, since the Sermon on the Mount, eloquence enthrall a people. Never did history rec a victory of truth over error; such a signal and fina of Christian charity over pagan pride and passion *that day, the children of St. Patrick have been the m of Christ on earth.*

As the waves, when lashed to fury by the north and, borne on the breath of the tempest, leap, r myriad-fold on Antrim's rocky coast, so swept the ous throng to meet St. Patrick. Wave after wave and the sun had sunk to rest and the bright s down upon royal Tara ere he retired to his tent. lowed by thousands who surrounded it, waiting of morning, to light them again to his presence.

Sybilla, accompanied by her friends, followed While her brothers and sisters pressed around all the fond endearments which their love coul fied their joy at her happy conversion, Mahon a silent; his heart was too full of happiness, and not paint the brightness and glory that surrou when Fergus on that night, seated on the green the tent of the Saint, struck the harp and pour of praise, Mahon's soul joined in unison, and l ed in the sacred strain, that woke the echoes valley. And Milcho's sons and daughters jo refrain, and every heart and every lip gave faith within their souls. It was the happiest life; he sat beside Sybilla; her proud broth sisters gazing upon her with tenderness and turned gaze, she appealed to God for mercy. beauty of her form and features, and the sw

ing melody of her voice, ravi-hed the soul of Mahon, and in a very ecstacy of delight, he returned thanks to his God, the hot tears streaming down his cheeks.

The midnight moon cast its bright beams on the river, ere they retired to rest. A tent was hastily erected for Sybilla and her sisters, and on soft beds of yielding moss, they reposed for the night. Despite the excitement which they, that day, had undergone, they soon sank into a calm and refreshing sleep. Kiaran and a few of his comrades kept watch and ward around the tent, aided by Mahon, who, all night long, patiently guarded the slumbers of his beloved.

As dawn broke, the silver sounds of the Saint's bell gladdenened the valley, and its tones woke to life the sleeping thousands. It was Easter Sunday, the first that had ever dawned on Erinn. On a green knoll an altar was erected, on which Patrick prepared to offer up the holy sacrifice. As the rich swell of his voice rose on the morning air, and he intoned the words of the Mass. "I will go unto the altar of God; to God who rejoiceth my youth," the multitude prostrated themselves on the ground and with hushed breath and quickened hearts, partook of the holy mystery. At the proper moment the Saint addressed them, and by his wondrous eloquence and lucid explanation of the truth, firmly and for ever, implanted in their hearts that faith which can never die. The wavering and vacillating became convinced; those who through fear of the King and his Druids had kept aloof, now came forward with burning ardor; and those who from first had believed, were filled with a more intense love for the wonderful God, whom they worshipped. Among the throng were many Druids. Wrapped in their tunics they looked on, in gloomy and disdainful silence. They wished not to believe, but feared the Apostle's power and persuasive eloquence. Ever and anon, as hundreds and hundreds of converts moved by some unseen power, bowed at the shrine of the true God, the tidings were, by them, conveyed to the King. They instilled into his mind an intense hatred of the holy man; and in exaggerated terms, gave an account of the unreasonable and impossible doctrine, which he taught. They scoffed and

mocked at the idea of the **Trinity**—three in one. **T**he monarch with wrath, and inflamed his heart to blood. They knew that on this day, the fate of the Erin would be decided; that the glory which Belus, many centuries had shed on the land, would either bephant or trampled on, forever, and they determined to face the Saint, if not by their superior skill and reason murder. Poor Pagans! They knew not the power which they were contending.

"He shall die!" exclaimed the king, stamping in brandishing his scin.

But the subtle Druids, chagrined at their humiliation the previous day, and wishing to inspire the people with dread of their arts, whereby they hoped to conquer the king, longed for another encounter with him, and advised him to postpone his vengeance until later in the day. They found difficulty in quelling the fierce storm they raised in Ireland, but were at length successful. He ordered the sea to be brought before him at a certain hour, and commanded the Druids to consult their gods, and then confront and combat the impostor. They departed, pleased with anticipated success over their enemy, and with the death which he would die.

It were vain to endeavor to paint here, that night on Tara's Hill. History recounts it. It is embalmed in song and story. The deeds of darkness performed by the king, and their vehement efforts to save, from annihilation, the gods; and their honest and sturdy resistance against the impostor, they considered wrong; all this is known to every reader. How Patrick met them in their stronghold of darkness and Hell; how, enlightened by the light of God, he performed many and wonderful miracles manifest to the people the hollowness of their idolatry; the duplicity of their priests; how, in proving the doctrine of the Trinity, he picked up the humble trefoil, which he then, been

"The chosen leaf,  
Of Bard and Chief,  
The green, immortal shamrock,"

and demonstrated the absurdity and false reasoning of the Druids of Bel; these and a thousand other facts, which the children of the faith believe, need no repetition here. The Irish Druids, then the most learned men in Europe, were vanquished by the words of Patrick; and their idols were shattered in the dust.

"These men, who had until then worshipped the elements, were to learn that there was a God, who controlled these elements, and thus to be taught that there was an Almighty Creator of all things. These Magi had exercised certain power by their incantations; they had to learn that these powers were under the absolute control of a God, of whom they had never even heard. They were also to learn, that whatever might be effected by the powers of darkness, were evils to be avoided, not benefits to be sought for. This, and much more, did St. Patrick teach the chieftains of old Erin on this Easter day."\*

The evening sun was setting ere the Druids retired from the contest. Foiled, baffled and defeated, some sought the recesses of their groves to commune in secret with their gods, and pray for vengeance on the head of the Saint; others sought the king to remind him of his promise, to slay the man who was working such evil in Erin; while many, lighted with grace, followed the Saint to his tent.

Filled with hope, thanksgiving and love, the holy Patrick left the royal hall of Tara and slowly wended his way toward the river. His heart was full to overflowing, for the mercies God had shown him, in his hour of trial; and wishing to be alone in communion with his Saviour and pour forth his thanks, he beckoned to his followers to retire, and proceeded to a little grove that lay on the outskirts of the city, and adjacent to the river's bank. They obeyed. But Kiaran, the veteran follower of Milcho, fearing to leave the Saint unpro-

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\* Cusack's Life of St. Patrick.



soldier, clad in the uniform of the king's guard, with a spear poised in his hand, and in the act of hurling it at the heart of St. Patrick. He stood under the shadow of a huge oak, whose spreading branches almost hid him from view. Kiaran rushed forward and interposed his body between the Saint and the assassin at the moment when the weapon left the latter's hand. Kiaran heard the whiz of it as it approached him, and instinctively throwing up his hand to ward off the fatal shaft, succeeded in clutching it. Quick as lightning he reversed it, and hurling it with all his strength, pierced the heart of the would-be assassin, pinning him to the tree. So certain was the aim, and so fatal was the blow, that the unfortunate wretch died instantaneously. Two accomplices hid in the bushes, seeing the fate of their comrade, fled in the direction of the king's palace. St. Patrick doubted not but they were sent by the king, and the unrepentant Druids, to murder him; and again returning thanks to God for his deliverance, resumed his way to his encampment.

That night, as the May-moon shed her lustrous beams on the white tents of the Christians, and a hundred harps sounded in praise of Him who had redeemed and purified them, and a thousand voices blended in harmony and rejoicing, Sybilla, drawing the curtains of her tent aside, stepped into the moonlight, and seated herself by a tree which overhung the tent. The paleness had left her cheeks, and the tranquil brow and calm and unruffled look on her features, told of the peace within. The haughty scorn, so lately depicted there, had departed; while in its place a look of love and resignation shone. Every lineament was as lovely as what we imagine of the angels; and her beauty, seemed, in the mellow moonlight, more of divine than mortal mould. At least, so thought Mahon, as doffing his plumed hat, he approached and sat beside her.

"I have longed for this hour, Sybilla," he began in a low,

soft whisper. "I have prayed and sighed for the moment, when together, we could mingle our hearts in one, and I could call you Christian."

"Mahon, little did I deem, two days ago, that this would come to pass. But God decreed that I should suffer humiliation for my pride, and in His mercy He has had compassion on me. I have been obstinate, but I have suffered much, and it is well. I thought my sorrows could never be effaced; but, trusting to Him whom I have found, I feel an undefinable glow—a *something* that sheds balm upon my spirit, and gives me a happiness which I have never before known."

"It is the spirit of the true faith which animates you, Sybilla, and brings comfort to your soul."

"Nay, I am but a novice. Yesterday I was a daughter of Bel. You, who have been a Christian in Dalaradia, perhaps, for years, are more worthy to possess the happiness which faith can give, than my proud, obstinate heart."

"Sybilla, it is not so. When you banished me from your presence, I was a pagan, as proud and obstinate as yourself. Conra wronged me. He sought my life, and wrought me ill, with your sire and brothers. Knowing I would be sacrificed to his wrath, because I dared to love one, destined for his shrines, I sought my own territory; but my heart being weary with its weight of love and woe, unheeding I went astray in the forest. I found shelter in the house Conall and Owen, and from them, first learned the faith I now profess. I looked upon them with horror, when they first disclosed their doctrine to me; but it pleased God that I should believe. When I returned to Dalaradia with the holy Patrick, I was a Christian—but not till then."

"O Mahon! the memory of our meeting then, will never be effaced from my poor heart. The horrible reality presented to my vision of that dreadful day, fills me with remorse and fear."

"It will fade away when your heart, forgetful of its former false joys and hopes, and your mind, filled with nobler and grander thoughts, seeks solace at a better and truer shrine. Time ameliorates all things, and faith and love can conquer the heaviest sorrows of the heart."

"It may be, Mahon ; but I never again dia ; I will never again look upon the w the towers of my old home."

"The Braid winds as peacefully as ev of Dalaradia ; and where the towers stood, a church is erected to the Living

"On the site of my father's castle ?"

"On the site of your father's castle witnessed its erection."

"O ! how he deceived me. The Evil in my heart or else I had not believed h Christian dared to erect a shrine to his ashes, and the profanity was avenged workmen were struck by lightning, and ished. And that thou, Mahon, endeav

"His tongue spoke the foul thoughts Sybilla ; and both were evil."

"He also said you were a wanderer f your kindred ; that the clansmen of T as a renegade, and your younger brother your father, who died with a broken h elected chieftain in your place."

"A fiend possessed him, and he died signed for me."

"O Mahon ! I believed him the fav the brightest follower of God on earth. his Christian enemies, and when leaving ered Virgins, to become a vestal, hoped before him. A shudder passes through of his bla-phemies rises before me, an God's vengeance, that struck him dead. Then I beheld the power of the Chri scorn and mockery in my heart were cl and woe. The noble bearing of Patric the dark Druid, might have told me w But my heart was blinded by pride and looked with scorn and contempt upon, blood, whom I considered traitors. C

living lie, and dearly hast thou paid the penalty. Thou wert the murderer of my father!"

"Let us speak not of that Sybilla; the wound is yet fresh, and thoughts of it will only serve to keep it longer green. God decreed that these things should happen, and we should be obedient to his will. Let me rather tell what events happened after your rescue from the castle, and dissipate the foul slander which the Druid threw upon my name."

"I will listen willingly, Mahon, and do all in my power to right the wrong I have done you. What a mist has been lifted from my eyes, and how apparent God, when He pleases, can make the truth appear!"

Mahon, in a simple and unassuming manner detailed the events which occurred since her hasty flight from Dalaradia, until their meeting at Tara. Modestly he mentioned the part he played in her rescue; but with feeling told of his joy on again beholding her. The treachery and perfidy of Conra, he condemned and deprecated, but forgave him as became a Christian.

"But never did we despair of you, Sybilla," he said in conclusion. "When in the hut of Conall I told the story of my love, he told me that thou wert too bright a pearl to be lost to the faith; and, though proud in spirit, and steadfast in the faith of Erinn, thy heart would melt before the words of the blessed Patrick. His counselling gave hope and vigor to my soul, even before I met the holy man of God; and often in my lonely hours I prayed for thee. I have seen Congal and Una melt to tears, and Cathal, Elie and Ova tremble with emotion at mention of thy name. Artgal and Bratha brought me tidings weekly, of my friends, and when we met at Augher, ere we departed for Tara, our prayers were mingled together for thy welfare and conversion. Mass was daily offered by Conall, who is now a priest of God, for thy soul's sake, in the church of Dalaradia. Fergus had gone on a pilgrimage to Tara, but though he could obtain no tidings of thee, we well knew that Conra had placed thee in the College of Virgins, and that we would meet thee at Bealtinne. Once face to face with the Apostle of Christ, we feared not the result. Praise be to God! our hopes have been verified!"

remember you in their prayers, and Cathal, when at the altar, will not, surely, forget you."

"And Sybilla, when Cathal is a priest of God, and Ova and Elie have become the brides of Christ, and Congal and Una united, and swaying the wand of chieftaincy in Dalaradia, what dost thou intend to do?"

"A life of penitence and prayer, Mahon, is meetest for me."

"I know of one, Sybilla, whose halls are lonely, and whose heart pines for thee. There are soaring mountains and fertile valleys in Tir-owen; broad acres and lordly towers. There are glens and lakes on which the sun ever shines, and plains where the wild deer wander free as the winds of heaven. And there is one who lords it over those broad domains, not so much by inheritance as by his people's love. A thousand spearmen leap to his bugle-call, and a thousand shields keep music to the harp, in his banquet hall. On the day on which he is crowned at Tullough-oge, were Sybilla by his side to share his honors and his love, he would not change his state to be Ard-Riagh of Erin. Dalaradia delights thee no more. Long and fondly have I loved thee, bright pearl of my soul. Thy heart was once mine. O Sybilla! give it me again, and hie thee to the green woods of Tir-owen, where thy Mahon's heart will ever beat in unison with thine, and, blessed by our holy Church, and happy in our people's love, we too will be happy. The holy Patrick himself, will smile upon our union, and bless us. Speak, Sybilla! Congal and Una are approaching. How fondly she smiles upon him! O speak! idol of my soul!"

His impassioned manner and burning words sunk deep into her soul. She looked upon his manly and noble face—her lips parted as if to speak, unconsciously displaying the bright pearls within—she hesitated to utter her thought, but seeing

Una and Congal draw nigh, turned, with a love-lighted smile in her eye, her sweet face to his, and softly whispered—

"I will go with thee to Tir-owen."

He had barely time to clasp her hand in his, when Una, rushing forward, threw herself into the arms of Sybilla.

"O Sybilla!" she exclaimed, "we depart on the morrow for Kilcurran. Will you not accompany us?"

"I know not, Una," she answered, "until I hear what Congal and my sisters advise."

"Then Congal's advice is," said her brother, "that you and Mahon depart with us. Patrick leaves in the morning for Lagenia. I have consulted with Fergus and our friends, and as Ova and Elie must proceed to Dalaradia to prepare for their reception into the Christian Sisterhood, we consider it our duty to bear them company thither. Besides, Cathal has been placed under the tuition of Conall, and Kilcurran being at no great distance, we can always communicate with each other. If Mahon would only accompany us, our happiness would be complete. Kiaran, my father's old standard-bearer, insists on returning with me; and his companions, Barrfinn and Dima, who, until to-day, scoffed at everything the Christian holds dear, have been regenerated by the waters of baptism, and follow the holy man of God, whithersoever he goes. The hand of God truly guided Kiaran to the grove where Patrick knelt to pray; and the death of Laegari's spearman has struck terror to the hearts of the unbelievers. It was truly an interposition of Divine Providence. But the wrath of the Ard-Riagh is not appeased. Once the good Patrick leaves, it will burst forth, and, instigated by the Druids, he will have revenge on the Christians. In peaceful Kilcurran we will find repose. Sybilla needs rest, and in new and different scenes, far from the Braid, she will forget her sorrows. I know her sisters would like her to be present at their reception into the Sisterhood, and Cathal at his ordination. And having nothing further to prolong our stay at Tara, let us depart at the morning's dawn. Does Sybilla consent?"

"Willingly, Congal, and with Una by my side, I shall endeavor to forget the past, and hope only for the future."

"Then, Mahon, it remains for you to give your consent to complete our happiness."

"Freely I accord it, Congal, provided you tarry with me a week in Tir-owen on your way thither."

"You have expressed my own thought, Mahon. It was the wish of my heart. Let us proceed to the tent of Ova and Elie, and convey to them the glad tidings. They marvel at our absence. I hear the harp of Fergus. There is not a happier heart in Tara to-night than his."

Mahon much doubted the last assertion of Congal, but with a smile he arose and accompanied Sybilla to the tent of her sisters.

## CHAPTER XXII.

## THE CORONATION AT TULLOUGH-OGH.

The Caesar of Rome has a wider domain,  
 And the Aid-Riagh of France has more clans in his train;  
 The sceptre of Spain is more heavy with gems,  
 And our crowns cannot vie with the Greek diadems.  
 But kinglier far before heaven and man  
 Are the emerald fields and the fiery-eyed clan—  
 The sceptre and state, and the poets that sing,  
 And the swords that encircle a true Irish king!

Thrice looked he to Heaven with thanks and with prayer,  
 Thrice looked to his borders with sentinel stare—  
 To the waves of Lough Neagh—to the heights of Strabane,  
 And thrice on his allies, and thrice on his clan.  
 One clash on their bucklers, one more, they are still—  
 What means that deep pause on the crest of the hill?  
 Why gaze they above them? a war-eagle's wing!  
 'Tis an omen! hurrah! for the true Irish King!

—Davis.

It was Summer, A. D., 434. Rosy June smiled on the green woods of Tir-owen. Lake and river lay bathed in the crimson glory of the rising sun. His bright beams fell upon the mountain tops, kissing the red blossomed heather, and shedding a flood of light and loveliness, on hill, and stream and valley. Round Tullough-ogh Rath the flowers bloomed in beauty; the lark caroled her jocund song to the morning; and the woods that fringed its rugged sides, were musical with the notes of a thousand songsters. Calm and placed as an infant's smile the sleeping waters lay. The emerald foliage of the woods appeared and shone in beauteous contrast, when reflected on their silvery bosom. It was a fair and gladsome scene, on which the eye would love to feast, and



the heart, forgetful of its cares, lull itself to sleep in dreamy ecstasy.

And throughout all broad Tir-owen, from the waves of Lough Neah to the golden sands of Mourne—from where Knock-a-vae raises its stalwart peak above Strabane, and sentinels the Finn and Foyle, to where the green groves and fertile plains of Dungannon lie, there was mirth and joy, glee and revelry. For on this day the wand of chieftaincy was to be placed in the hands of Mahon; and he was to be proclaimed the first Christian Chief of Tir-owen.

As the sun ascended in the heavens, and the mists of the mountains disappeared before his fiery glance, a strain of martial music pealed on the air, and issuing from the dense groves that surrounded Tullough-oge, a band of armed men was seen approaching. Their bronzed helmets and spears, polished and bright as the sun himself, reflected his light, and hinging it aside in dazzling splendor upon the tranquil surface of lake and river, showed in bolder relief the bright foliage of the woods. They numbered one thousand men, and were the soldiers of Dalaradia, led by Congal, their chief. He led the van, and beside him, mounted on a gray palfrey, rode his sister, the Princess Sybilla, and following her were fifty maidens, clothed in green. Una accompanied the priests, attended by Cathal, Owen, Bratha and other men waited on them and placed each chief and lady in their respective places round the coronation chair. Beside the latter, a throne was erected for her who was the chosen bride of him who was destined to sway the Sovereignty of Tir-owen. It was vacant, and could not be occupied until the Prince himself placed his chosen one in it.

They had scarcely taken their positions when a bugle-blast, long and loud, woke the slumbering echoes of the hills. Immediately a band of horsemen appeared, their steeds caparisoned, and prancing and dancing to the music of trumpet, and harp, and cymbal, behind them. The emblazoned device on their banners proclaimed them the clansmen of

connel. Next to them came the clansmen of Cuil-Rathain.\* They numbered a thousand shields. As the clans halted on the rath, the music ceased, and for a space a solemn silence reigned. Suddenly the gladsome chimes of a church bell, whose spire could be seen peeping through the foliage, rung out a welcome peal. Then, emerging from the green wood, with gay banners and waving plumes, Mahon and his followers appeared. Surrounded by a thousand battle-axes, the young prince of Tir-owen advanced until he stood opposite the coronation chair. Doffing his plumed hat, he bowed gracefully to the ladies and chiefs, and attended by the lords of Tir-connel and Coleraine, seated himself on the throne.

Again the bell in the church spire rang out a gladsome peal, and slowly emerging from the sacred edifice, St. Patrick, robed in full canonicals, followed by a band of bishops and priests, advanced toward the coronation ground. Conall, Owen, and Cathal, in their robes, followed in his train. As the Saint approached Prince Mahon, the latter rose and reverentially saluted him. Then O'Cathan, the chief of Coleraine, taking the young prince by the hand, led him to St. Patrick's side. At the same time, Congal, approaching Sybilla, led her to Mahon, and placed her hand in his. The blushes came and went on her beautiful face, like sunshine on the wavelets of a summer lake; and of the hundred maidens who attended her, none looked so lovely as she. Congal and Una, accompanied by the chief of Tir-connel, ranged themselves by her side. And there, in the blessed light of day, beneath the blue dome of heaven, the first Christian marriage was celebrated in Tir-owen. Mahon's happiness was complete, and joy danced in his eyes as he clasped the hand of Sybilla, and claimed it as his own. Nor were the hearts of Congal and Una less joyous. A smile lit up the bright eye of the young Dalaradian, as he gazed on the blushing face of his beautiful bride, and pressed her to his bosom.

At the conclusion of the ceremony Mahon led Sybilla to the throne, and seated her by his side. A shout of joy burst

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\* Cuil-Rathain, Coleraine, Co. Derry.

from the multitude, a thousand spears rung on their shields, and cymbal, and harp and pipe resounded to the praise and honor of the chieftain of Tir-owen. As the clangor ceased an aged Brehon rose and read to him the laws of his clan, his duty to his country and people, and the laws which he should abide by in order to preserve his sovereignty. Having given his adherence to all which custom had imposed on such occasions, O'Cathan placed in his hand the white wand of chieftancy, and proclaimed him "a true Irish King."

Again the blare of trumpet and clank of spear and shield resounded over the rath of Tullough-oge, and a deafening shout arose which startled the wolf of the mountain from his lair, and echoed to the wooded heights of Mourne. The musicians struck up a martial air, and to the music of a hundred harps, headed by St. Patrick, the chiefs and ladies proceeded to the banquet hall. Ere they reached it Conall stole softly to Mahon's side and whispered proudly in his ear:—

"Did I not tell thee Prince, in the hut by Lough Neah, that this happy hour would arrive?"

"Ay, truly didn't thou, good Conall, and praised be God! thy words have come to pass. But were it not for thee, thy teachings and advice, this happy hour had never dawned."

"Nay Mahon, give praise to Him who never dawned, thy poor hut, and to the holy saint whose blessing you have received to-day. He is well pleased with thee and Princess Sybilla, and is happy in your happiness."

"He and thou will ever be remembered in our prayers, dear Conall, replied Sybilla, and we shall never cease to think of thee. Since the light of truth dawned upon my heart, thy name has been ever dear to me. If the prayers of one so unworthy can ascend to heaven, thy days will be full of peace and happiness, and love."

"My heart is full to overflowing, Sybilla, and joy and happiness possess my soul. For is not green Erin to-day, rescued from the evils of superstition and idolatry, and her altars, and the tones of a thousand harps mingle their melody with a million voices in praise of our Redeemer. The idols

of Bel have fallen, the darkness is dissipated, and the sun light of Truth beams upon the land. Truly, this man has wrought a wonderful change in Erinn."

"All were not so stubborn, Conall, as Sybilla. Had they been, it would have caused woe in Erinn. I shudder at my obduracy and pride."

"Think not of it, daughter; God's ways are mysterious. Thy sudden conversion at Tara, perchance, brought more souls into the fold, than if thou hadst at first believed. Thy frown banished Mahon from thee, and was the cause of his finding salvation. Thy smile would have detained him by thy side, and led him to perish with thee, in the flames of thy dwelling. But God and his angels were watching over thee and guided Mahon to thy rescue."

"And here comes one, who, under God, was instrumental in guiding me also," said Mahon, pointing to Artgal, who now approached with Kiaran.

They had been sent by Congal to precede the Prince and Sybilla, in order to clear a passage through the dense crowd that thronged around the banquet hall to see them as they entered.

Beckoning Artgal to his side, Mahon paused, and taking gold brooch, glittering with gems, from his breast, placed on that of Artgal.

"'Tis but a poor recompense for thy good services, friend, but thou art remembered in my heart," he said, grasping his hand.

"Thy words, my prince, will be treasured dearer than the gold."

"I doubt it not, good Artgal," said Sybilla: "Thy love known to me, and, though poor the offering, accept this from her whom thou hast so truly served."

Taking from her neck a heavy chain of gold, she placed around his. He dropped on one knee to receive it, and his heart beat high with pride, as the slender hand of Sybilla touched his cheek. A blast of martial music now filled the air. St. Patrick had reached the banquet hall, and hurrying forward, Mahon and his bride entered. The Saint was fi

conducted to an apartment in the castle, where attended by his ocolytes, he disrobed and proceeded to the hall. While seated at breakfast, the harpers and bards chanted a *rann* in honor of Tir-owen and Dalaradia. They rehearsed their glories; their prowess in the field; their wisdom in the council; their gentleness in the hall. They recited in glowing converse the bright and enduring fame of their native land; told of the ages of old, and prophesied, that even a brighter future was in store for her. Under the ægis of Christianity, with the cross, she would soar until all nations would bow the knee in homage to her valor, her virtue and her sanctity. Then, warmed by the theme, they struck their harps in an extemporaneous hymn of thanksgiving to God, blessing Him for His mercies, and supplicating Him to always look down with an eye of love, upon green Erinn.

As they ceased, the spears of the warriors resounded on their shields, and the emphasis of their blows, responded an emphatic "Amen" to the prayer of the bards.

When the banquet was over, St. Patrick arose and left the hall followed by Mahon and his chiefs. As the good Saint appeared before the soldiers, one and all knelt on the ground to receive his parting benediction. He was departing for Armagh, to erect there a cathedral, whose fame afterward spread over the world. After a brief address, he bestowed on them his blessing, and affectionately taking leave of Mahon and Sybilla, and their friends, proceeded on his journey.

On the occasion of the inauguration of a chief in Tir-owen, a festival was always maintained for three days and nights. Athletic games and sports were indulged in, and mirth and joy and revelry reigned. The chieftain first reviewed his clansmen and auxiliaries, who offered their fealty, and this time done, their arms were laid aside, and the remaining time which passed in mirth. It was an ancient custom, and one which usage had made peremptory. But never did the hills flaunt with brighter bonfires; never did the harp sound sweeter; and never did chief or clansman pledge his love for the prince of his choice, in more heart-felt accord, than did the flower of Ulster's chivalry for Mahon of Tir-owen, and Sybilla, the pearl of Dalaradia.

When three days and nights had expired, the prince's friends and auxiliaries departed for their homes, bearing with them many presents from the young chief, and with their hearts filled with love of him, and his boundless hospitality.

Congal and Una sojourned in Tir-owen until their followers became impatient at their delay, and hastened them back to Dalaradia. Long years after—when their children had grown around them, stalwart warriors and lovely maidens—they revisited the green woods of Tullough-oge, and to their children repeated the story of their lives.

And from the chieftains of Dalaradia and Tir-owen sprang a progeny whose piety and valor shone in after times, as stainless and bright as any that ever bore the Cross. Their learning and sanctity were confessed in monastery and abbey, from the pillar towers of their own land to the pillars of Hercules. They converted Scotland and England to the true faith, and gave to every country in Europe Religion and Literature. And in many a well-fought field, against Dane and Norman, they gave proof of the faith that was in them by offering up their lives for God and country. From the first ravages of the Northmen to the battle of Antrim, in ill-starred '98, the sons of Ulster were ranged on the side of Religion and Liberty.

Cathal, as the reader is aware, became a priest, and his sisters, Ova and Elie, took the veil. They were the first Christian nuns in Ulster. Fergus, the bard, remained with Congal, in Dalaradia, until his death, which occurred ten years after the inauguration at Tullough-oge. He sleeps on the banks of the Braid, the murmur of whose waters he loved so well. Dina followed in the train of the Saint till his death.

Conall and Owen lived to a green old age, ministering to the spiritual wants of the Dalaradians, and in death were laid side by side, in the church erected on the ruins of Milcho's castle. Bratha became a priest, and occupied Conall's place on his decease.

Carbre, Felim. Ibar and Artgal remained in the service of Mahon, beloved by him and Sybilla: and when God called

them to repose, their last hours were soothed, and their eyes closed in death by the Tir-owen chieftain and Sybilla of Dalaraia.

## L'ENVOI.

Dear land of Bards and Saints, to me  
 There's naught so dear as thy minstrelsy,  
 Bright is nature in every dress,  
 Rich in unborrowed loveliness.  
 Winning in every smile she wears,  
 Winning she is in thine own sweet airs.  
 What to the spirit more charming can be  
 Than the lay whose lingering notes recall  
 The thoughts of the holy, the fair, the free,  
 Beloved in life and deplored in their fall?  
 Fling, fling the forms of art aside,  
 Dull is the ear which these charms enthrall,  
 Let the simple songs of our sires be tried,  
 They go to the heart, and the heart is all!  
 Give me the full responsive sigh,  
 The glowing cheek and the moistened eye,  
 Let these the minstrel's might attest,  
 And the vain and the idle may shape the rest!

—*Furlong.*

To the student of Irish history, the scenes I have endeavored to depict in these pages, will not come amiss. He knows they are historically correct. The subject is a grand one. If I have not come up to his standard of delineation, whether in writing of Ancient Erin, the fault lies not in my will, but in my ability. Under what depressing circumstances and adverse fortune "Sybilla" was written, he will never know.

To those who stood at the civilization of Ireland prior to the arrival of St. Patrick, and laugh at the miracles said to have been performed by him, I can only say, *read Irish history.* The conversion of the Irish from Paganism to Christianity: one of the brightest chapters in the history of the world. It was effected almost without blood. *Their warm hearts, free souls, and educated minds* became imbued in one day with the saving truths of the Gospel of Christ, while it took centuries of preaching and teaching to instil the same truths in the duller and more besotted nations of Europe. One word



think that the creed, so often and easily accepted, would be as readily shaken off. But it was not so. The ancient Irish were a *thinking* people. How they and their descendants clung to that creed, their history attests. Their martyr-roll outnumbers Rome. They have been the missionaries of Christ for fourteen centuries. The Catholic faith is engrafted in their hearts; it can never be effaced, never obliterated; but will endure until their native mountains moulder into dust and the sun sinks into the ocean of eternity!

WILLIAM COLLINS.

BROOKLYN, N. Y., 22d day of the month of May, 1879.

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